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523 East 14th Street
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452-1235

Native American Alcoholism
& Drug Abuse
1815 39th Avenue
Oakland, CA 94601

534-2737

Native American Health Center
3124 East 14th Street
Oakland, CA 94601

261-0524

Administration

436-0455

Dental

261-1962

Medical/Perinatal

436-6837

WIC

532-2933

Family Guidance Center

261-8943

Youth Empowerment

Urban Indian Child Resource Center
390 Euclid Ave
Oakland, CA 94610

~~832-2386~~

208-1870

ALVIN
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West Bay

American Indian AIDS Institute
333 Valencia
San Francisco, CA 94103

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San Francisco, CA 94103

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56 Julian Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94103

621-8054

Administration

621-8056

Dental

621-8051

Medical/Perinatal

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Non-Profit Tax Exempt Letters Dated 7-25-88 issued by Franchise Tax Board, IRS Letter Dated 10-26-88 Exempt Under 501 (c)(3) and 509 (a)(1) and 170 (b)(1)(A)(vi)

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Mental Health Issues
in the Context of Culture, Race and Sexuality:
A Preliminary Study of Gay and Lesbian Native Americans

c by
Kathleen Erwin
May 1991
University of California, Berkeley



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The Creator never made people different without also giving them something extra special.

Richard LaFortune, Inyupik¹

Difference often provides the basis for stigmatization, discrimination and isolation among human social groups. The consequences of such oppression on individuals and groups labeled as "savage," "immoral" or otherwise "inferior" include disproportionately low income, poor physical and mental health and high mortality. Difference does not imply only suffering, however. It also offers an opportunity for creativity, talent and a unique perspective. The strength, determination and "something extra special" possessed by targeted peoples -- drawn from family, loved ones and culture -- has often been overlooked. This paper explores both the experience of oppression, and the strength of culture and community, of one such group: gay and lesbian American Indians.

Although diverse in many important ways, gay and lesbian American Indians share a unique cultural heritage in which gender and sexual diversity was, for the most part, accepted and celebrated, rather than vilified. The purpose of this paper is twofold: to examine the impact of this legacy on the identity and experience of gay American Indians; and to discover whether knowledge of the tradition mitigates the mental health effects of racism and heterosexism -- including feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, suicide and substance abuse -- on gay American Indians today.

Overview of the Problem

Since white contact, and continuing to the present day, Native Americans have been subjected to explicit and extreme forms of racism aimed at "civilizing," Christianizing, assimilating and exterminating Native peoples and cultures. Efforts to eliminate the indigenous cultures have included both the outlawing of Native religious and traditional practices, and the forced imposition of Euro-American, Judeo-Christian values.

One Native value shared by many tribes throughout North America was the honor and high social status accorded the "two-spirited" person, or the "berdache."² The berdache, considered halfman-halfwoman or not-man-not-woman, was a biological male who assumed a distinct, often highly respected, social role which has been interpreted by some as a "third gender," between male and female. Many berdache also maintained sexual relations with other men (Williams, 1986b, Whitehead, 1981, Callender & Kochems, 1986).³ There have been similar accounts of "female berdache" as well. The value placed on the berdache, along with the customs that accompanied that role, have been all but eliminated in most tribes today. In its place, many American Indians have assimilated the dominant cultural values -- including intolerance rather than appreciation for difference -- that, within the contemporary socio-political and cultural context, have led to the social ostracism of many gays and lesbians. According to the gay and lesbian Indian sources on whom I have relied to produce this paper, the assimilation of Euro-American "homophobic" attitudes has created a situation in which the most severe problem facing young gay and lesbian Indians today is social isolation.

The purpose of this paper is not so much to compare the berdache traditions to contemporary Western conceptions of homosexuality, for, as discussed later, there are some important distinctions. Rather, its purpose is to examine how the infusion of Euro-American concepts of gender and sexual diversity has influenced contemporary American Indian perceptions of both "berdache" and "gay." Moreover, given the diverse and layered understandings of gender and sexuality among contemporary Native Americans, this paper explores whether vestiges of the berdache legacy, as it has persisted and been reinterpreted in contemporary Native cultures, have had any mitigating affect on mental health problems associated with societal racism and heterosexism among gay and lesbian American Indians.

Epidemiologic evidence on the social and mental health problems facing gay American Indians is practically non-existent, except in the form of anecdotal descriptions. The statistics available for both American Indians in general, and for identified gays and lesbians, however, show disproportionately high rates of suicide, substance abuse and other indicators of mental and

social distress. Among Native Americans aged 15-24, the suicide mortality rate was 28 per 100,000 in 1981-1983; alcoholism mortality rates for all ages (adjusted) was 29 per 100,000 during the same period. The proportion of Native adults who drink alcohol varies according to tribe, from 30% to 80%. These rates are higher than for any other ethnic minority group (USDHHS, 1988, pp 235-236). In the identified gay and lesbian population in the United States, approximately 40% of adults said they had seriously considered suicide; of those, one-third to one-half said their homosexuality was a factor. Several studies have also shown that about 30% of gay men and lesbians could be considered "alcoholic" or "alcohol dependent" (Rofes, 1983, pp 17-21). These statistics probably underestimate the actual prevalence of these problems among both groups due to the invisibility and undercounting of both the American Indian and the gay and lesbian populations. Neither do these statistics capture the experiences of the majority of cases of mental and emotional distress that go unreported. Moreover, because of the double oppression of racism and heterosexism, it can be expected that indicators of mental distress would be at least as high, if not higher, for American Indian gays and lesbians (see Tremble, 1989).⁴

Methods and Approach

In order to better comprehend the life experience of American Indian gays and lesbians, this research paper is based on first-hand accounts from American Indian sources. I interviewed four American Indians living in the San Francisco Bay Area: two gay men, a lesbian, and a heterosexual woman. The interviews lasted from one and a half to two hours. The selection of these informants cannot be considered random. Upon the recommendation of some Native American and gay friends, I contacted the three gay American Indians. All of them are well-known in the San Francisco Bay Area for their activism on both American Indian and gay issues. Two of them work for Indian AIDS prevention agencies, and the third is director of a violence prevention agency serving the larger gay community. At some point over the last fifteen years, all of them have been affiliated with the organization, Gay American Indians of San Francisco. This organization has been active in cataloguing the berdache history in Native North America (see

Roscoe, 1988). It has also published Living the Spirit, A Gay American Indian Anthology (1988), which offers essays, short stories and poems on both the berdache tradition and on the lives of contemporary gay and lesbian Indians.

The heterosexual woman is a friend and classmate who offered her assistance to me in understanding both traditional and contemporary attitudes toward gender and sexual diversity among her people, the Jicarilla Apache of New Mexico. I have used her comments only sparingly because I wanted to focus on the perspectives of gay and lesbian American Indians. Nevertheless her contributions have been helpful in my understanding of the diversity among Native American peoples. I have also used first-hand accounts published by ethno-historian Walter Williams, based on his research primarily on the Pine Ridge, Rose Bud and Cheyenne River Lakota Reservations in South Dakota in 1982 (1986a & b).⁵ Williams' interviews balance my own since he focuses on reservation Indians who have not necessarily had any contact with the predominantly white gay culture of the San Francisco Bay Area. While my interviews together with Williams' do not constitute a representative sample, they do provide a spectrum of experiences and perspectives that indicate the richness in diversity among Native American peoples in the United States.

An important note with respect to diversity: the variation in culture among tribes must be acknowledged at the outset of this paper. Because of the need to pull together a critical mass of literature and data, I am not able to focus on the history and experience of just one tribe. Therefore, I sometimes make generalizations across tribes. These generalizations are prevalent in the literature, and while they do a disservice to the recognition of the diversity of American Indian cultures, at the same time, there are indeed shared historical and cultural themes among the Native peoples of this land (Williams, 1986b). Wherever possible, I am as specific in reference to tribes as the literature allows.

To provide background for the discussion which follows, I begin this paper with a brief overview of the "berdache" tradition, as it has been researched and understood by anthropologists, historians and Native American people themselves. Then I present findings from my interviews and research on gay American Indians today, followed by a discussion of social and mental health

issues facing gay American Indians, and the implications of this research for understanding the impact of culture, race and sexuality on the identity and mental health of gay and lesbian Native Americans.

The Berdache Tradition in Native North America

Any discussion of the berdache tradition must begin with the caveat that most of the literature is based on the observations, research and writings of non-Indian people. This is true even of the writings by some American Indians today, who, because of forced assimilation and lost traditions, must also rely on the historical record left by anthropologists from a prior period.⁶ Thus, what is "known" about the berdache are in fact observations that have been filtered through the eyes of culture and time.

Keeping this caveat in mind, there does nevertheless seem to be substantial evidence that in Native North America many tribes recognized a third gender, i.e., a distinct social role, available to biological males who combined characteristics of both men and women. The role and status of the berdache varied from culture to culture, but in many cases berdache were accorded high status as spiritual leaders, healers and teachers. In the case of the Navajo, this status is illustrated by the prominence of the "hermaphrodite" in the creation stories (Williams, 1986b; Roscoe, 1988; and Whitehead, 1981). Berdache -- recognized early in their lives by their affinity for female tasks or their selection of the basket, rather than the bow, in their puberty ceremony -- were thought to combine the perspective, strengths and spirit of both men and women (Williams, 1986b; Roscoe 1988; Burns, personal conversation).

The berdache often fulfilled social roles usually reserved for women, such as weaving, pottery and bead work. But despite often being described as "feminine," the berdache's role was distinct from that of women. For instance, since they could not bear children, they were not required to adhere to the same sexual and social taboos that women recognized during menstruation and pregnancy (Williams, 1986b, Callender et.al., 1986; Whitehaead, 1981). In addition, because they were physically stronger and not involved in childbearing, they often brought prosperity to

their families based on higher productivity. In many cases, the male berdache also engaged in intermittent or exclusive sexual relations with non-berdache males (Williams, 1986b; Callender, 1986; Blackwood, 1984).

Although the literature is more sparse on the "female berdache," or what Williams calls the "amazon," it appears that some tribes recognized a similar "fourth gender" role for women, mirroring (though not equivalent to) that of the male berdache (Allen, 1986; Blackwood, 1986; Williams, 1986b). The amazon women were often warriors, trappers and hunters. In some cases, they were believed to not menstruate. Paralleling the male berdache, they sometimes maintained sexual relations with non-amazon women. The most recognized case is that of *Gone to the Spirits* of the Kutenai Indians. She was a ferocious warrior, with strong shamanistic powers and many wives. Her legend has lived on for over a century in the Kutenai oral tradition (Williams, 1986b, pp 236-9).

The foregoing discussion provides only a broad-brush representation of the berdache and amazon traditions.⁷ The anthropological literature is filled with much more detailed, and sometimes conflicting, descriptions of the tradition. Again, these contradictory interpretations can be explained by the diversity of tribes, the selectivity of the historical record, and the varying interpretations of the earlier and contemporary observers. And while it is certainly true that the berdache and amazon were not *always* honored and accepted, it appears that for the most part they were. A complete understanding of the custom as it existed prior to white contact may never be achieved, however, because, as Alfred Kroeber comments, "while the [berdache] institution was in full bloom, the Caucasian attitude was one of repugnance and condemnation. This attitude ... made subsequent personality inquiry difficult, the later berdache leading repressed or disguised lives" (Blackwood, 1984, pp28).

The European conquest of the "New World" destroyed the economic stability and way of life of the Native American people; it also dealt a severe blow to Native traditions, including that of the berdache. As Kroeber alludes, Native customs were met often met with disdain, or worse, by

European conquerors and white settlers. Some berdache were killed, even eaten by dogs (Williams, 1986b). Others chose suicide, as one Lakota Indian today describes:

The missionaries and government officials said *winktes* were no good, and they tried to get *winktes* to change their ways. I heard sad stories of *winktes* committing suicide, hanging themselves rather than change. (from Williams, 1986a, p194)

Other berdache were forced to cut their hair, wear men's clothing, or go underground (Williams, 1986b, p178-180). Joe Medicine Crow, an elder Crow Indian interviewed by Williams, provided this account of Osh-Tisch ("Finds Them and Kills Them"), who was a well-respected *bade*:

One [BIA] agent in the late 1890s did more crazy things here. He tried to interfere with Osh-Tisch, who was the most respected *bade*. The agent incarcerated the *bades*, cut off their hair, made them wear men's clothing. He forced them to do manual labor, planting the trees that you see here on the BIA grounds. The people were so upset with this that Chief Pretty Eagle came into Crow Agency, and told [the agent] to leave the reservation. It was a tragedy trying to change them. [The agent] was crazy. (1986b, p179)

As Joe Medicine Crow's account illustrates, Indian people resisted the efforts of the white invaders to eliminate the berdache. Thus, in some cases, the berdache continued to be recognized and respected as a distinct social role into this century. In fact, one of Williams' informants told him that the "last true *winkte*" died only in the 1960s (1986a, p.195). And in one example of the tradition's continuance even in the present, documented on the 1991 television program "Gender: The Enduring Paradox," a *winkte* describes his distinct social role on a Lakota reservation.

For the most part, however, European conquest, followed by U.S. Government policies aimed at assimilation, isolation and termination of American Indian peoples, resulted in the berdache's gradual disappearance from most tribes by the early 1900s. The imposition of Christian and Western scientific notions of homosexuality have in many cases replaced the traditional understandings of gender and sexual diversity among Native Americans. However, in some cases, the cultural beliefs regarding the "two-spirited" person have persisted, and been reinterpreted in reference to the Western concepts of gay and lesbian. The extent to which vestiges of their unique cultural heritage have impacted their experience as gay and lesbian American Indians in a contemporary racist and heterosexist⁸ society is the focus of the remainder of this paper.

Gay American Indians Today: An Introduction to Key Informants

While acknowledging that most Native peoples no longer live a "traditional" way of life, some gay and lesbian American Indians have embraced the berdache legacy as a means of reclaiming their cultural roots. They feel that knowledge of the tradition is important for building self-esteem among gay and lesbian Indian youth who face the challenges of "coming out" in a racist and heterosexist society. Barbara Cameron, Randy Burns and Ron Rowell, three gay American Indians now living in the San Francisco Bay Area who were interviewed for this project, agree that reclamation of this heritage on the part of Indian people is an important step in overcoming homophobia in the Indian community. Before launching into a more theoretical discussion of the relationship of the tradition to the contemporary lives of gay Indians, I first present background on each of my informants in order to frame the issues from the perspective of their life experiences.

Barbara is a 37-year-old Lakota lesbian who grew up on the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota. She is the oldest of eight children, and the eldest grandchild. Barbara feels she was treated differently from other Lakota children because of the circumstances of her birth. She was born during a bad thunder and lightning storm, which is very symbolic to the Lakota people. In addition, she was born with a caul,⁹ or "white veil," which meant that she had extraordinary powers. Thus she was treated as very special; she said she was "spoiled," but not in a negative way.

Barbara moved from her mother's house to live with her grandparents at age five. She chose to live with her grandparents so that she could go to school with other Indian children (in the town where her mother lived, all the school children were white). At home, Barbara spoke mostly Lakota with her grandparents, and some English. Her grandparents encouraged Barbara's education, and wanted her to go to medical school. They told her that she could be anything she wanted even though she was a girl and a Lakota. Barbara described her early experience with gay people as follows:

I had several gay relatives, but we didn't talk about it that way. I had an aunt and two cousins who were gay. They were different, but accepted by the family, and they stayed with the family.... We always referred to my Aunt Verna as Uncle Verna -- but not to her face. It wasn't negative, just teasing, part of the way people related to each other.

Although Barbara's aunt and cousins were not outcasts, neither were they elevated to a special position, as in the berdache/amazon tradition. Barbara notes, "That tradition was a long time ago -- not when I was growing up. Indian people didn't know to treat them as special."

Barbara realized she herself was different at a young age:

When I started first grade, I knew, but I didn't know what it was.... When I realized in junior high that I was a lesbian, I was very upset because I was a girl. I loved women and I thought I needed to be a man to love women. It took two years to accept that I couldn't be a man. But in high school, I resolved it for myself. I had a close friend in junior high and high school, it almost bordered on sexual, and I stopped being friends with her one day because it was too hard to deal with. Then I graduated from high school as a junior, one year early. I had an affair with one woman working in the Vista program and tried to commit suicide -- partly because of coming out and partly because my friends were mad at me for graduating early.... It only took me a couple of years to become comfortable being gay and Indian, and realizing I didn't have to choose one or the other. I could just be.

Randy is a 35-year-old Northern Paiute gay man registered with the Pyramid Lake Reservation in Nevada. He grew up primarily in a small town in northern California, but returned to the reservation with his family for about four years when he was in high school. Randy went to a small public school, and he and his siblings were the only Indians in the school. Randy remembers his youth fondly:

We had a big, extended family. There was my mom and dad, and my two older half sisters. Their father was Navajo, but he left my mom. My mom has been together with my dad for many years, although they never officially married. Together my mom and dad had four more kids. The we adopted two cousins, and had lots of nieces from the oldest kids running around. I have a very good and beautiful family, I had a wonderful childhood, playing outdoors, everything a kid could ask for.

I was raised between two worlds. My parents shared a lot of the history and storytelling, and we spoke Paiute at home.... But we were very integrated into the white world. There weren't any Pow-Wows like there are today.... My (maternal) grandma died at the IHS hospital and my grandfather was living alone, so we moved back to the reservation to care for him.

Randy grew up playing mostly with his sisters, and didn't have any male playmates. He was expected to do the "manly" chores like shooting, hunting, collecting wood and helping fix the car (which he hated). Randy didn't know any gay people when he was young, but when his family moved back to the reservation, he met a "character" whom he eventually met again in a gay bar in Reno. "This guy was named Paul, they called him Lady Five Fingers." Meeting other gay American Indians was important to Randy when he was coming out.

I knew at age seven or eight that I liked men, but I didn't think of myself as gay. That comes later with personal sexual experience. At age 12 or 13, I started having sexual relations with bisexual men on the reservation -- Indian men who were married, but also played around when they got loaded. They would pretend the next morning that it didn't happen, 'Oh, what happened last night?' As if they didn't know, right?! Because they always came back for more. I never forgot what happened, so I knew I was different. At the same time, during puberty, I had some experiences with two of my cousins, yet they grew up and got married....

Finally, I met Lady Five Fingers in a gay bar in Reno. I went to Reno when I was about 16 and met other people like me, but I didn't come out. I went to my first gay bar when I was 17, and at 18 I moved to Reno. At the gay bars, I met other gay and lesbian Indians. That's what opened the doors for me.

Randy moved to San Francisco and met other gay and lesbian American Indians there. Together they formed an organization called Gay American Indians of San Francisco. As a group, they began exchanging stories regarding the "traditional gay role" in Native cultures. Later, Randy talked to his mother about the tradition among the Northern Paiute.

I never learned about the traditional gay role when I was growing up. In Paiute we call it *tuva'sa*, but later (about three or four years ago), my mom told me that each generation in our family had a *tuva'sa*, and my uncles carried out that role. They took care of the family. Led a single life. They were effeminate, but they also went hunting. They did bead work. I got angry when she told me about that role, because I felt I was denied. At the turn of the century they went through that ceremony with the basket and the bow, but I wasn't given that right. So I got angry with my mom, but she's old, and so I overlooked it. In our tribe, in my family, when a child reaches puberty he is given the choice of basket or bow, if he picks basket he will carry out the girl's chores. If he picks the bow, he will carry out the man's role.... That's what my mom told me.

Ron is a 42-year-old Choctaw Indian from Oklahoma. He refers to himself as a "mixed blood." Because he doesn't "look Indian," and because he could not be registered since the U.S. Congress closed the tribal roles from 1907-1975, Ron always felt different, left out. Now he

realizes that these characteristics make him, in fact, a "typical" Indian. "As the 'blood quantum' are decreasing, mixed bloods are now the majority. If we don't claim being Indian, we will be defined right out of existence!"

Ron spent many of his growing-up years living with his maternal grandparents. His grandfather was Choctaw Indian. He was close to his grandfather, who told him stories about the old territory and ancient relatives. Ron never heard his grandfather speak Choctaw, although he claimed to know it. His grandparents did not have strong sex-role expectations, but his mom didn't think boys should read, and they should play football. To Ron, sports equalled humiliation. He was a musician, and this worried his parents.

When I was growing up, I became good friends with an older gay man, a 'screaming queen.' He wasn't 'out,' though. He was the church organist, and into art, theater and drama, so he had lots of neat things. In my junior high days, I spent lots of time with him. No one was concerned about my friendship with him.... I didn't have any negative associations with being gay until I was 13. I was fooling around with a friend, and he said his father told him this was 'queer' and 'bad.' At 13, I was perplexed by that because sex was bad, period.

In high school Ron was non-sexual and during college, he missed the intimacy of a close relationship. After he graduated from college he went to Europe, and eventually (in 1969) realized he was gay.

I met an American, an openly gay man. We had a lot in common. I realized that's who I am, and I could just be who I am. Gay people deserve human dignity and freedom. When I came back to the U.S., I came out to my folks, and that was traumatic.

I didn't learn about the berdache tradition until I was an adult. The Choctaw tribe is Baptist, and the people share most of the ideas of white baptists. The efforts to [stamp out] Indian traditions and culture have been very effective. They see being gay the same way white people do.

The stories of Barbara, Randy, and Ron are rich in their diversity. They highlight several themes including: perceptions of sexuality; knowledge of the traditional role (or lack of it) and its importance in their own lives; issues regarding "coming out;" and the effects of racism on their lives and identities. These themes will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Berdache and Gay: Dimensions of Cultural Persistence and Change

Although the male berdache and the amazon maintained sexual relations with partners of the same biological sex, the sexuality of the "two-spirited" person must be disentangled from the modern concept "gay." From a theoretical perspective, the distinction rests primarily on the unique gender role attributed to the berdache and amazon. In Native cultures, occupational pursuits were the most important distinguishing factor of the berdache, with dress and demeanor "coming in a close second;" sexual object choice was part of their gender configuration, but its salience was low (Whitehead, 1981, p97). In addition, the berdache did not have sexual relations with other berdache, and their male sexual partners were not considered "berdache," "special," or otherwise different from men who had strictly heterosexual relations (Williams, 1986a; Whitehead, 1981). Emphasizing this point with reference to the amazon, Midnight Sun points out, "if a culture's sex/gender system makes it possible for a biological female to become a social man, then 'he' is (not) engaging in lesbian behavior by having sexual relations with women. Because he is a socially recognized man, such relations would be defined as 'normal'" (in Roscoe, 1988, p 35).

Such clear-cut theoretical distinctions, however, do not elucidate the ways in which the berdache/amazon traditions may be interpreted within the context of individual Indians' life experiences. Based on Williams' research and my own interviews, there appears to be a considerable amount of variation among Native Americans with regard to their perceptions of these terms and to whom they should apply. These distinctions may be due in part to: (a) the degree to which particular Indians identify as living "traditional" lives; (b) whether they live on reservations or urban areas; and (c) whether they themselves identify as "berdache," "gay" or "heterosexual." For example, Ron said that on the Navajo reservation, there are still *nadle*, "who would never sleep with another *nadle*. *Nadle* sleep with 'straight' men.... But there are also gay-identified Navajo men." Ron pointed out that this variation highlights the "spectrum of acculturation around gay issues in the Indian community."

Some Indians may identify differently depending on the connotations associated with various English words referring to same-sex activity. Williams found that for some of the Natives

he interviewed, "homosexual" refers to the sexual behavior itself, and does not refer to spirituality, personality or social role (1986a, pp223). For this reason, many Indians consider the term homosexual to have negative connotations. For example, one 32-year-old Lakota man who identifies as *winkte*, and takes his traditional religion very seriously, told Williams:

'Homosexuals' are two he-men who live together as a couple. That is not done here; it is an effeminate and a he-man.... The man could be gay but he must still be masculine. (from 1986a, pp 196)

Williams also found that many Natives see the term "gay" as fitting more closely with an Indian understanding of a man who is not stereotypically masculine. (One wonders if this applies to women, as well, who are not stereotypically feminine.) Thus many Indians use "gay" interchangeably with the Native words, as they both imply not only same-sex activity, but also include aspects of a person's spirit and lifestyle. This finding was consistent with my interviews. Randy referred to the berdache as the "two-spirited person" and as "the traditional gay role." With reference to his own identity, he said he sees himself as a gay man living the spirit of the *tuva'sa* in a modern world.

As an urban gay Indian, I see myself living the spirit of the *tuva'sa*. I am here today sharing with the world the knowledge of my people, my tribe, my family. I am not ashamed, I am very proud. *Tuva'sa* played a go-between role, taking care of the family. I see myself playing that role in a contemporary way. I see myself as an Indian man who happens to be gay.

However, some gay Indians believe that a distinction should be made between the traditional role and contemporary gays. Barbara Cameron, for example, is cautious about the analogy between the berdache and contemporary gay Indians. She views research on the berdache as a fad-like "trend" among whites in the gay community. Nevertheless, she still feels:

It's nice to know our people were not as savage as white people toward gays. It's good to be validated about our people and how smart we are... but that was a long time ago and we don't really know... [The berdache tradition] has been romanticized in some ways, and many Lakota and other (Indian) people no longer live that way of life... They don't know the background or history and think of 'lesbian' and 'gay' as a disease brought by white people that has infected the Indian community.

When asked about the Lakota *winkte*, who appeared recently on "Gender: The Enduring Paradox," Barbara suggested that some Native Americans are raised in very traditional ways, and

may still identify with the traditional roles and carry out spiritual activities. However, she stated, this is not the case for the majority of American Indians; Ron and Randy corroborated this sentiment.

Among heterosexual Indians there are other distinctions between perceptions of the berdache identity and the gay identity. Sometimes, this distinction is based on negative stereotypes of contemporary gays, who are seen to be distinct from the traditional berdache because gay-identified Indians may not carry out a spiritual role. For example, one 60-year-old Lakota heterosexual man interviewed by Williams stated:

Some people today are called *winkte*, but I don't think they are really *winkte* because they don't have spirituality. They are just 'gay.' There's a difference. Maybe they just got that way from smoking and drinking. And most of them don't even know about the *winkte* tradition. (from 1986b, pp 193)

In some cases, especially among Indian youth who have not learned about the berdache tradition, both English and Native words are used as ridicule (Williams, 1986b, pp 212).

Yolandra, a Jicarilla Apache heterosexual woman, said that when she was growing up, "gay" men were accepted, although they were seen as different. But the growing visibility of gays, and the AIDS crisis, have stigmatized both gay men and lesbians on her reservation.

I remember growing up, there was a man who used to talk about getting his period. I couldn't figure out how that could happen. But I just accepted it.... Now things are different, but my mom still defends an older gay man on our reservation. It seems like younger gays and lesbians have more problems [with acceptance].

People don't understand how AIDS is transmitted. They think you can get it just by touching someone who is gay. Now the young people think being gay is really bad. They call gay people names.

The foregoing discussion clearly demonstrates the diversity with which Native people from different cultures, backgrounds and lifestyles comprehend "berdache" and "gay" in contemporary society. As Williams points out, cultures are not static and these changing concepts must be seen as part of an ongoing process of culture change. Ron echoed this sentiment, saying, "Cultures change over time. They are like people. Cultures are alive and fluid. Indian people in the present make Indian culture what it is."

Consequences of the Euro-American Conquest:

Heterosexism and the Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Indians

Heterosexism⁸ is a form of social oppression experienced by all gays and lesbians.

However, the manner in which it is experienced by gay American Indians within Indian communities must be understood within the bounds of that particular social, cultural and historical context. The particular aspects of heterosexism, shaped by that context, are the focus of this section.

All of my informants agreed that negative attitudes held by the majority of heterosexual Indians regarding gay-identified Indians are founded on the adoption of white values by Indian people. Because many Indians today do equate berdache with homosexuality, there is often denial among Indian people that the berdache was once revered. Randy described this situation on the Pyramid Lake Paiute Reservation as follows:

When I was growing up, and especially nowadays, Indian families didn't talk about the gay role, or they forgot because they have been Christianized by the church.... Indian people think white; [they] have been white-washed, brainwashed -- everything about them is white.

Recently my mom asked some people back home about a famous Indian woman, 'Wasn't Sarah Winnemucca a *tuva'sa*?' All the old ladies back home freaked out. 'What?! Oh, I don't know what you are talking about.' So there's a lot of denial, even among the old people. A lot of homophobia on the reservation. Some of that homophobia is because there are three churches on the reservation. Also, our tribe has had many wars for water rights...and we had lots of anthropologists and grave diggers to deal with, so we had lots of contact with whites.

Because of the hegemony of white attitudes towards homosexuality, many gay and lesbian Natives face rejection from family as well as from other tribal members. In Randy's case, this made "coming out" to his family very painful:

I didn't tell my family at first. But Indian people gossip a lot and the best way to deal with gossip is to face it. The subject of marriage had come up, so I had to tell my parents I was gay. I had moved to San Francisco, and my roommate (of 17 years now) and my best girlfriend and I went to visit my family. We were practically thrown off the reservation. My father said, 'You've made my son a queer and a faggot!' My mom reacted, too. It ended very violently. We left. I was shocked, but not surprised. Then, six months later, my sister went back to the reservation and told them, 'If you are going to "86" my brother, you might as well "86" me.' Mom came around, dad

never did. Now my mom has come to respect me as a whole person, we are real close. We have lots to offer each other.

Since rejection is a very real possibility, both Randy and Ron suggested that the decision to "come out" must be carefully selected, depending on the circumstances. For Ron's part, he said coming out to his family was "traumatic." Now, in his work in AIDS prevention among Native Americans, he says:

The Indian community is so important to me, and I fear rejection from the Indian community, so I often don't come out as gay in front of Indians. I let people get to know me first. Homophobia in the Indian community comes from pure ignorance.... Indian people don't have sex education, so they lack knowledge of human sexuality.... Homophobia among Indian people, for the most part, is not malicious.

What may appear superficially to be homophobia may stem, in fact, from other aspects of Native history and tribal politics. Randy described one such example from his own life. Several years ago, he said, he asked his mother why he was never given the chance to have a Basket and Bow Ceremony to acknowledge his role as a "two-spirited" person. His mother told him that although she knew from the time Randy was 15 that he was special, she feared rejection from other Paiutes on the Pyramid Lake Reservation.

My father was Pit River Paiute, and the Pit River traded with the Paiute. Once, the Paiute got very jealous, and there was a war between the Pit Rivers and the Paiute.... The Pit Rivers cut the stomachs of Paiutes. This is thrown in our face, even today. So our family was different from other families by being part Pit River. This made my mother more protective, she didn't want people to think even more bad things about us. But I forgive my parents now.

Another reason some Indians may feel cautious about explicitly "coming out" is because sexual and gender diversity traditionally was, and in many cases continues to be, observed and noted, but not openly discussed, except in jest. Barbara described the experience with her family in that way:

I don't talk about being gay to my family. My sister has met my lover and our child, though. And about 10 years ago, my mom met my lover at that time. A few years after mom met [her], after we had broken up, my mom called out of the blue and asked if I was still with [her]. Besides that, we have never discussed it. We don't have an intrusive relationship -- you observe and accept or not, but in my family you don't intrude.

While some of these perspectives and concerns regarding homophobia, and "coming out" may be shared by gays and lesbians who are not Native Americans, their particular construction is shaped by the uniquely Native experience. Because many Native peoples feared retribution by the white government, missionaries and other intruders, their denial of homosexuality -- vilified in the dominant Euro-American culture -- can be seen as somewhat protective, especially in light of the fact that many gay-identified Indian youth do live with or near their families in harmony. Put another way, many Indian people have internalized the heterosexism of the dominant society, often as a means of self-protection. Among the younger generation and both the young and old in more assimilated tribes, however, this nuance has been lost, and their homophobia more closely resembles that of the dominant culture.

One way to address this homophobia, according to my sources (including those cited in Williams, 1986b and Roscoe, 1988), is to provide education to Indian people regarding their traditional customs and values pertaining to the berdache and amazon. In this way, sexual and gender diversity can be seen within the context of the traditional Native perspective, rather than as "a disease spread by white people," to use Barbara's words. In fact, these kinds of educational efforts are the very way in which I learned about the berdache tradition, when a Taos Pueblo storyteller, psychologist and sex researcher affiliated with the Kinsey Institute presented a slideshow and talk to approximately 50 Indian and white health care workers in California. His message was clear: this is a tradition to be proud of; contemporary gay and lesbian Indians should be accepted. And although they may not carry out traditional social and spiritual roles, their gifts should be viewed in light of traditional Native values celebrating their unique spirit.

Indian Identity and Racism: Experiences of Gay American Indians

Just as heterosexism experienced by gay American Indians must be understood from a particular cultural and historical perspective, so is the racism they experience largely shaped by their unique identity as Native Americans. The racism described by my informants has occurred

on several different levels, in relation to self, in relation to peers, and in relation to the "gay community."

In discussing the effect of racism on self and identity, Randy described his difficulties in "coming out" as gay, being American Indian:

Coming out was hard because I came from a very racist environment from childhood until we moved to the reservation. I often felt very angry, so part of my coming out had to do with the issue of racism and how I felt toward non-Indians. Also, I had problems around how people saw me, so when I came out, I came out as co-founder of Gay American Indians, and got involved in politics. But it took one or two years to break through that anger.

Ron echoed this experience:

There's lots of racism in the gay community and in AIDS organizations. The gay community in San Francisco requires conformity -- 'ethnic politics' are very 'uncool.' It can really ruin a social encounter to acknowledge that you are not part of the dominant race. Those kinds of experiences make it difficult to feel part of the 'gay community.'

Barbara feels that most gays and lesbians do not understand the particular ways in which racism affects Indian people, since they are not active in supporting political issues important to Indian people, such as recognition of treaties, land rights and self-determination. She also feels American Indians continue to be stereotyped, even by other gays and lesbians of color:

To white people, Indian people are still invisible... even among gay and lesbian people of color, Indian people don't fit in. Indian gays and lesbians are at the bottom of the hierarchy. I feel lots of disappointment and resentment because of the invisibility, and the way Indian people are patronized and romanticized.... When gay groups ask gay and lesbian American Indians to participate, it's always to do ceremonies; they don't recognize what else we can do. This happened at the Gay and Lesbian People of Color Conference.

Such stereotyping also affects Indian self-identity. According to Ron, "many Indians don't 'feel Indian.' They don't know what it means to 'be Indian'." This affects both those who "look Indian" and those who do not fit the stereotypical image. Because he doesn't fit that stereotype, Ron has seen another side of racism directed at Native Americans:

As a mixed blood, you always feel invalidated. People act surprised when you say you are Indian. They ask 'How much Indian are you?' Or, 'You don't look Indian.' Who would ever think to say those things to someone from any other [ethnic] group?! What does it mean to be Indian? Indian people must determine who, what and why we are. We are the only ones who can decide. White people will just have to accept that.

Of course being gay and Indian is not only about oppression. It is also about strength and the positive aspects of having a unique identity. Both components of that identity bring feelings of pride. Ron said, "Being gay is like belonging to a special club. Wherever you go, you can find other gay people." Similarly, Barbara talked about the importance of her Indian identity: "I feel more powerful than other non-Indian gays and lesbians because this is my country.... I feel fortunate to be Indian. I know my people, my history, and my history here is very long."

The feelings of pride expressed by Ron, Barbara and Randy, along with what Randy described as his "go-between role" building bridges between American Indians and gays, highlights one of the special gifts that gay American Indians have to offer -- the gift of themselves as role models for young gay and lesbian Indians facing feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and possibly suicide. The problem of mental health issues facing gay and lesbian American Indians, and the solutions envisioned for them, as defined from the gay American Indian perspective, are discussed below.

Mental Health Issues of Gay and Lesbian Indians: A Social Problem, Social Solutions

Based on the experiences and insights regarding their own lives that Randy, Barbara and Ron have shared, it is clear that the mental health problems facing gay and lesbian American Indians must be viewed within the larger social, historical and cultural context. Because of racism, heterosexism and cultural hegemony, gay and lesbian Indian youth, in particular, are often denied positive role models and avenues of social and personal fulfillment both on the reservation and off. The challenge of "coming out" in such oppressive social conditions has been illustrated by the stories of Barbara, Ron and Randy. "[Randy] wants to prevent the sense of isolation and despair that faces some teenage gay Indians, who react by committing suicide when they recognize their homosexuality. If their family knows and accepts them as gay, then suicide seldom occurs" (from Williams, 1986b, pp211).

Gay and lesbian Indian youth *feel* isolated because in many cases they *are* isolated. And while the urban gay community offers some opportunities for social ties and role models, because of racism, that "community" is not sufficient to meet the social, cultural and personal needs of gay and lesbian American Indians. Barbara described the issues facing gay Indian youth by saying, "You feel no one else is like you. You want to meet other gay and lesbian Indians (not just other gays) because they are very much like you. That's important." Moreover, Barbara pointed out that urban gay social encounters have traditionally centered around bars, and this is particularly detrimental to gay Indian youth. "Lots of gay American Indians have an alcohol problem. Indian youth should avoid that scene." Thus, the isolation must be addressed through greater visibility of adult gay Indians providing education and role models for youth.

To meet this challenge, many gay American Indians have initiated social, educational and political activities. In order to fulfill their own need to meet other gay and lesbian Natives, Randy and Barbara founded Gay American Indians of San Francisco (GAI/SF) in 1975. The importance and success of this organization is demonstrated by its growth from five original members to more than a thousand members nationwide. Similar organizations, like American Indian Gays and Lesbians of Minneapolis, have sprung up in other major cities. The groups hold annual spiritual gatherings for gay and lesbian Indians, medicine people and spiritual leaders to build on their feelings of strength and community.

These organizations have been active not only as social groups, but as political and educational organizations, as well. As mentioned previously, the GAI/SF History project, coordinated by Will Roscoe, resulted in the publication of Living the Spirit, A Gay American Indian Anthology. The sister organization in Minneapolis, with the support of the agency Ron directs, has produced a video called Honored by the Moon in which many lesbian, gay and bisexual Indians discuss the traditional value placed on the "two-spirited person" and the challenges of "coming out" today as gay Indians. In addition to the above projects, many gay Indians have actively sought to provide positive role models for youth through their work. Each of my informants works in either Indian or gay-identified agencies, combatting AIDS, violence and

other health issues affecting Indians and gays alike. Randy also counsels gay Indian youth regarding "coming out," dealing with family and finding local support and social networks. This activism is allowing gay American Indians to shatter their invisibility and have their voices heard.

Concluding Comments: Implications of this Research to Public Health and to Understanding Mental Health in the Context of Culture, Race and Sexuality

This paper, although broad in scope, is a preliminary attempt to examine mental health in the context of social oppression, and to begin to elucidate the relationships among oppression, cultural heritage, identity and the strength to endure that shape the lives and experiences of contemporary gay and lesbian American Indians. While this research is too preliminary to draw firm conclusions, I highlight several issues demonstrating its relevance to understanding mental health in the context of culture, race and sexuality.

The berdache tradition in American Indian cultures has long been the fascination and disgust of many anthropologists and other non-Indian observers. In reference to the berdache, George Catlin, an early ethnographer, remarked, "This is one of the most unaccountable and disgusting customs that I have ever met in the Indian country" (from *Midnight Sun in Roscoe*, 1988, p 135). More recently, scholars interested in studying gender and sexuality have delved again into researching the berdache tradition. While their depictions and interpretations have been more favorable than those of most early anthropologists, some have "idealized" the tradition, viewing it outside of its particular historical, political and social circumstances. As a result, their work has not adequately addressed the underlying issues relating to its disappearance: institutional racism, heterosexism and cultural hegemony. These issues not only led to the decline of the berdache and amazon traditions, they also lie at the root of the mental and social health problems facing gay and lesbian American Indians today.

As this paper has shown, much of the psychological distress -- i.e. feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and suicide -- experienced by gay and lesbian Native Americans (especially youth) has been shaped by their unique position in the dominant cultural and social system in the United

States today. Racism and heterosexism have resulted in a situation in which American Indian gay and lesbian youth lack opportunities to lead socially and personally fulfilling lives. Many also lack positive role models and social support networks. Given these conditions, it is not surprising that many gay and lesbian Indians report mental health problems, particularly associated with "coming out."

While these feelings are expressed by many gays and lesbians, and certainly many of the same conditions are experienced by other gays and lesbians of color, this paper has illustrated certain characteristics of racism and heterosexism that are particular to gay and lesbian American Indians. Moreover, this research has shown that the berdache/amazon tradition has not been entirely eliminated by Euro-American domination. Rather, in a few cases it has persisted or been revitalized along much the same lines as existed in an earlier period. In the more general case, the berdache/amazon has been reinterpreted in reference and contrast to the Christian and Western biomedical interpretations of homosexuality, and the growth of the gay liberation movement. While the gay liberation movement in some ways may have been responsible for this new dialogue and interplay between traditional Native American and changing Western understandings of gender and sexuality, it is Indian people who will determine its ultimate impact on the lives of gay, berdache and heterosexual Indians. This determination is still unclear. As Paula Gunn Allen, a Laguna Pueblo/Sioux lesbian writer, said in reference to the amazon tradition, "It remains for us to discover what it means" (1986, p281).

With respect to the research question formulated at the outset of this paper -- whether knowledge of traditional values regarding gender and sexual diversity in Native North America mitigates against the detrimental mental health effects of racism and heterosexism -- Barbara, Randy and Ron all acknowledged the importance of learning about the berdache/amazon tradition in their own lives and agreed that such knowledge is important to foster in the larger American Indian population. Revitalizing respect for those people gifted with the unique perspective is one way to combat the hatred that racism and heterosexism have engendered. As Ron stated,

Knowing about the tradition helps me feel more centered, and less upset about homophobia. People are taught to hate others.... We need a new approach to combat hatred. I hope the revival of Indian culture will bring about more acceptance of gay American Indians.

And while all three hope that the revival of Native American traditions will bring with it a renewed respect for contemporary gay-identified Indians, according to Randy, the impetus for that change must come from gay American Indians. He feels that the heterosexual Indian community needs to be pushed and reminded of the special gifts gay and lesbian American Indians have to offer through their unique perspective and spirit -- that "something extra special" to which Richard LaFortune referred.

Lastly, the role of public health professionals in promoting the mental, as well as physical, health of gay and lesbian American Indians should be in financially supporting the educational and political efforts of gay Indians. It should be to actively challenge the institutional and structural barriers that act to keep gay and lesbian Indians "at the bottom of the hierarchy," to use Barbara's words. This means supporting legislation which recognizes the political, religious and land rights that continue to be denied Native Americans. It also means actively supporting policies that provide equal legal and economic rights to members of alternative family structures, and that promote positive images of gay and lesbian people, including gay and lesbian Indians, in the media. And finally, it means recognizing that Indian peoples and traditions are alive, growing, changing and flourishing in this country as we embark on the 21st Century. If public health institutions and professionals can fulfill this mandate, we will have gone a long way toward assuring the health of not only gay and lesbian American Indians, but also *all* Native Americans and sexual minorities in this country.

End Notes

¹ Quoted from Honored By the Moon, a video production by American Indian Gay and Lesbians of Minneapolis and the National Native American AIDS Prevention Center of Oakland, CA.

² "Berdache" is the term found in much of the anthropological literature. Many anthropologists and observers also used the terms "hermaphrodite" or "transvestite" in reference to the berdache. For the purpose of this paper, when referring to the traditional role, I use the specific Native words whenever possible. Otherwise I use the terms berdache or amazon (see note 3) and the term "two-spirited person" interchangeably. I reserve the terms gay and lesbian for referring to contemporary American Indians, as that is the term they used for themselves.

³ As discussed later in the paper, many tribes also recognized a similar role for "amazon" women (a term coined by William, 1986a). However, because of the "invisibility" of women, and particularly women's sexuality, in the early anthropological literature, much less has been recorded about this phenomenon.

⁴ This assumption is supported by a study conducted by Tremble, et.al. (1989). The authors found that for gay and lesbian youth of color, the social stigma resulting from being gay was compounded by familial rejection of gay children. Thus, the usual support that youth of color receive from their parents, when facing the challenges of racism, was often not available to gay youth, resulting in higher rates of psychological distress including feelings of isolation and suicide. Although Tremble's study did not include any Native Americans, because of the similar double oppression which gay American Indians face, it seems acceptable to extrapolate these findings to that population.

⁵ Williams published both an article entitled, "Persistence and Change in the Berdache Tradition Among Contemporary Lakota Indians" and The Spirit and The Flesh in 1986. The book is more comprehensive and includes research beyond that from the Lakota Reservations. I use material from both publications in this paper.

⁶ See for instance the writings of Midnight Sun in Living the Spirit, and Paula Gunn Allen in The Sacred Hoop (referenced in the bibliography).

⁷ For a more complete discussion of the berdache and amazon, see references at end of this paper. While I read extensively about the tradition, I have decided not to include an extensive discussion of the berdache/amazon since the focus of this paper is contemporary gay and lesbian Indians, and the findings from my interviews.

⁸ Recently, the term "homophobia" has begun to be replaced by "heterosexism," which incorporates both the idea of dislike of homosexuality and gay people, and the societal and institutional-level discrimination against gay and lesbian people. The term heterosexism draws a parallel with other forms of discrimination, such as racism and sexism. In the case of Native American cultures today, heterosexism may, in fact, be the more accurate term, since it implies that the negative attitudes held toward gay Indians have been imposed by a more powerful political entity. In this paper, I use the term heterosexism as much as possible. However, because homophobia is the more common term, often used in conversation, I sometimes use it as well.

⁹ Caul is part of the amnion sometimes covering the head of a child at birth (Random House College Dictionary, 1980)

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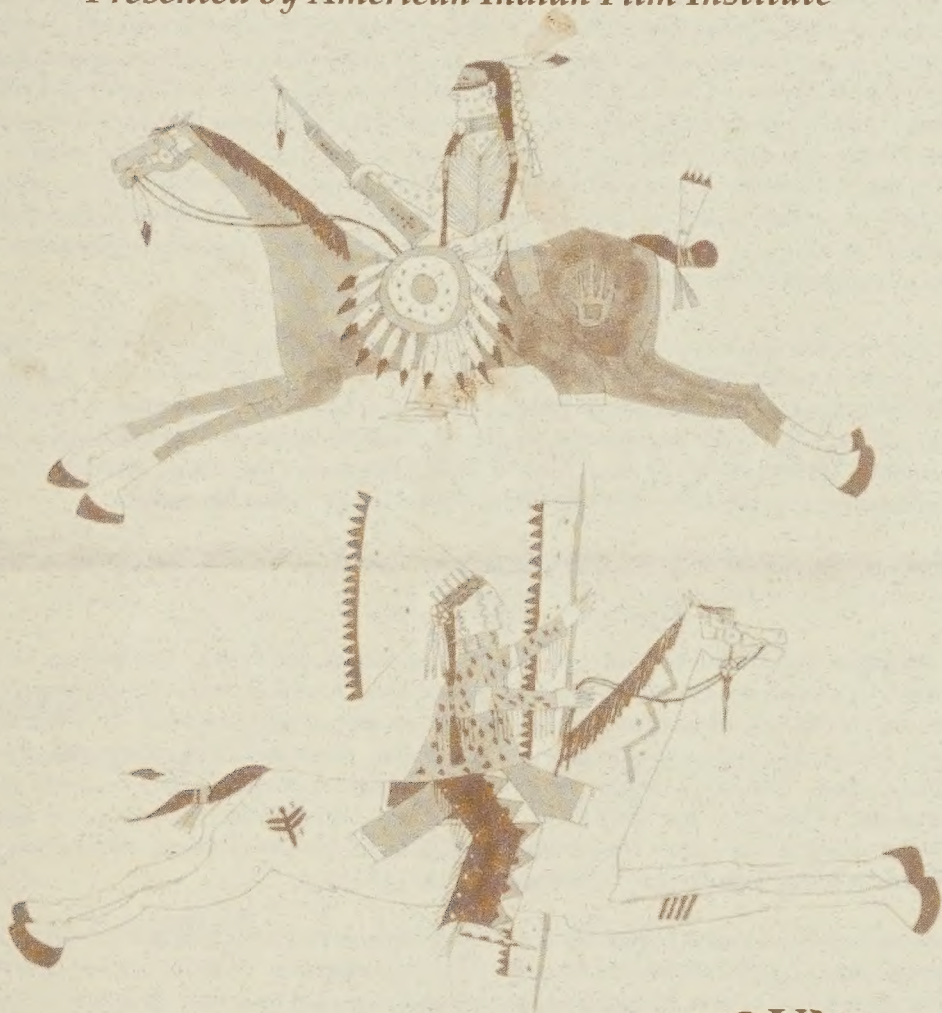
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SCHEDULE

Saturday June 14

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 11:00 AM | Doors open to general public
Indian Market open |
| 12:00 PM | Gourd Dancing |
| 1:00 PM | GRAND ENTRY I
Flag Song & Invocation
Intertribal dancing |
| 6:00 PM | Dinner Break |
| 7:00 PM | GRAND ENTRY II
Flag Song & Invocation
Intertribal dancing
Contest Finals: Youth Catagories
Adult Contest Semi-Finals |
| 11:00 PM | Indian Market closes
Pow Wow concludes |

Sunday June 15

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 11:00 AM | Doors open to general public
Indian Market open
Gourd Dancing |
| 12:00 NOON | GRAND ENTRY III
Flag Song & Invocation
Intertribal dancing |
| 2:00 PM | Contest Finals:
Mens & Womens |
| 5:00 PM | Awards Presentations
Conclude Pow Wow & Indian Market |

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Jorge Lechuga, Mylo Iron Bear, Rhongea Southern, Mike Dale, Eddie Hummingbird, Abel Herrera, Andrew Herrera, Art Neri, Allan White Owl, Adrian Phoenix, and Julian Phoenix

Wild Horse Drum is a group of American Indian singers who live in Southern California. The group is comprised of young men from several different tribes. Their lead singer is Jorge Lechuga of the Dineh nation. The *Wild Horse*



Singers have spent several years learning the special songs used in pow wows and in ceremony. They can sing both Northern and Southern plains styles, but they specialize in the Northern style. Their repertoire includes songs from the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, Cree, Arapaho, Dineh, Blackfeet and other nations. Over the past few years, this young intertribal drum has become very popular, not only in Southern California, but as far away as Greece, where they traveled last summer as host drum for a Native American dance tour. During the past year, they have also visited Hawaii as host drum at pow wows on the Big Island and on Oahu. Last Fall, they performed an honor song at the American Indian Film Festival. They are much in demand, and spend most weekends traveling to pow wows all over California. The *Wild Horse Singers* abide by strong guidelines and principles, not only in the way they conduct their business, but in the way they live. Each year the Drum travels to Green Grass, South Dakota, where the original Calf Pipe is held, to sing for the Sundance. The Drum stresses sobriety, spirituality, education, tradition and the passing on of songs and culture to the coming generations. Some of the singers are currently in high school and college, and new members now being taught to sing include younger boys.

The singers have produced a cassette tape of their songs, which has been very popular with audiences, and they are now producing a new CD. They have also been asked by the National Park Service to record a song for a new installation dedicated to Native Americans on the Island of Alcatraz, where they recently sang for a memorial gathering. *Wild Horse* puts on their own intertribal pow wow in Los Angeles for the purpose of giving back to the community that has supported them for so long. *We are glad to be a part of the Silver Star Pow Wow.*

SOUTHERN HOST DRUM NO NAME DRUM



Alfred Chalepah, Jr., Victor Pacer Chalepah, Alan Chalepah, Rick Camacho, Chris Camacho, Charlie Camacho, Earl Neconie, Joe Perdiguerra, Gene Ray Ahboah, Eddie Roubedeaux

No Name Drum was formed in the spring of 1991 under the leadership of Alfred Chalepah, Jr., Apache/Kiowa. *No Name Singers* has been host Southern Drum at many celebrations in central and north central California. *No Name Singers* are descendants of different Southern Plains tribes and several western tribes. *No Name* sings traditional songs from several tribes from Oklahoma; war dance, war mothers, victory, scalp, family songs, gourd dance, and other social dance songs. *No Name* is always honored to host Pow Wows. We are pleased to sing and share the songs with the people and hope the spirit of the songs are enjoyed by everyone.



The *Drum*, more than just a musical instrument to those who own and play it, has its own life. Some drum groups have gone through ceremonies and had their drums blessed and named, and the drum is regarded as a person with its own powerful spirit. Gifts are made to the drum and some drums even have their own sacred medicine pipes. In some traditions, the drum symbolizes the heartbeat, in others, the powerful medicine of thunder. The beat of the drum is like a heartbeat, starting slowly and then beating more quickly as the singers get further into the song. The drumsticks connect the singers to the power of the drum as they sing.

SILVER STAR POW WOW HEAD STAFF

1996-97 AMERICAN INDIAN FILM INSTITUTE SILVER STAR PRINCESS



Chia Winona Halpern is of the Devils Lake Dakota, Chippewa-Cree and Cayuga tribes. She is 19 years old and attends U.C. Berkeley. She is very honored to have served as Silver Star Princess 1996-97.

HEAD WOMAN DANCER

Shannon L. Nagel, *Comanche/Kiowa*
Santa Clara, CA

HEAD MAN DANCER

Algene Washington, *Shawnee/Creek*
Richmond, CA

HEAD GIRL DANCER

Smoke Johnson, *Paiute/Seneca*
Livermore, CA

HEAD BOY DANCER

Allen Chalepah, *Kiowa/Apache*
Kingsburg, CA

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Robert Valdez, *Laguna Pueblo*
Laguna, NM

ARENA DIRECTOR

Earl Neconie, *Kiowa*,
San Pablo, CA

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ICE offers insight and opinion relating to new Indian films and media works, provides Indian personality profiles and interviews with established and emerging talent, and promotes works that enrich the American Indian film media communities.

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SPORTS TEAM NAMES AND THEIR MASCOTS

What Is The Point Of All This Protesting?

Because some people do not understand why Indians are so upset over the use of stereotypical mascots and sports team names, we have compiled this list of the most commonly asked questions on this subject.

Q. *Don't these symbols and images help to remind us of Indians?*

A. While it is true that for many non-Indian Americans, these caricatures are often the only contact they have ever had with Indians, their history or their culture, the images portrayed do not accurately depict Native Americans. In fact, the representation of Indians as stereotypes is highly offensive to the majority of American Indians. It is insulting to our elders and demoralizing to our children.

Q. *It doesn't hurt anyone, so why bother changing it?*

A. This is a common misconception. These stereotypes and caricatures hurt both Indians and non-Indians alike. The impact these images have on Indian people can be quite serious, particularly to the young. Non-Indians might feel quite differently about this subject, if the only images their children had to identify with in the society around them were stereotypes and caricatures. This can seriously damage their self-esteem and their ability to succeed in the world. Also, Indian children, like any others are taught to respect their parents and to emulate their culture, traditions and values. However, it can be very confusing for young people to see their parents and their culture being mimicked and lampooned. As a result of the ways in which Indian culture is denigrated, American Indians suffer from the highest rate of teenage suicide, school drop out rates, alcohol and drug addiction and health care problems. Indian children suffer with low self-esteem issues and the resulting problems.

As for non-Indians, the worst thing is that continuous association of Indians with these stereotypes, can encourage an unreal idea of who Indians are. This can lead to a refusal to accept real Indians and their culture. In addition, the power of these stereotypes can also cause non-Indians to be misled or duped by unscrupulous people who "dress up" in buckskin and feathers in order to fool non-Indians. Often, these imposters engage in such fraudulent activity in order to deceive the public and separate naive individuals from their money!

Also, by participating in these racist parodies of Indian culture, the perpetrator demonstrates a disturbing lack of respect for cultures which differ from his own, and in doing so, demonstrates lack of respect for himself as well.

Q. *But this practice is not racist.*

A. What is usually really meant by statements like this is, "I am not a racist!" or "Racists are people who hate others, I do not hate anyone!" or "I don't mean any harm! My friends and I are only having good, American-style fun!" The truth is, that when any group of people is presented as an object of scorn or bufoonery, racism comes into play. Dehumanizing an entire race of people to the point where they become defined by another culture's ideas of how they look, act or how they should look or act, is categorically wrong. How could anyone seriously defend such an action?

For example, Americans have had enough exposure to Black culture to know that it would be terribly wrong to dress up in grass skirt, blackface make up, a bone through the nose and rubber spear and to run around yelling "Ooga-Booga!" This would definitely be racism, and would not be tolerated by the Black community. Why then, is it thought to be OK to engage in the same type of racism against Indians, dressing in buckskin, chicken feathers, warpaint and, rubber tomahawk and doing the chop? The generic "Indian" hook nose, hair braids, headband and war bonnet are as highly offensive to Indians as a blackface get up would be to Blacks! These stereotypes come straight out of America's past - from a bygone era when the Frito Bandito, Little Black Sambo and the Dumb Polack were tolerated and condoned by mainstream society. But those days are gone, and so are those tired stereotypes. Unbelievably, the old racist images of Indians remain. It is high time we threw these ugly images away and began a time of healing. Like it or not, no matter what your intent may be, by condoning the use of these stereotypes, you are helping to perpetuate racism and injustice toward Indian people.

Q. *What about Indians who say this is OK?*

A. First of all, it must be noted that the majority of Indian people, as well as most Indian leaders, educators and organizers, have spoken out against these practices. The consensus in Indian Country is that racist images must go! The National Indian Education Association recently adopted a resolution condemning the use of racist and stereotypical images by Sports and Media. This is a very important issue for people of all colors and beliefs, and we should not try to divide people into two categories; such as, "those who think it is wrong", and "those who don't". Rather, we should look at this problem as an issue of racial injustice for people of all colors. Each of us must examine our conscience to determine the answer to the question, "*Do I treat others with respect and dignity, as I myself would want to be treated?*" Changing these insulting names and demeaning images would do much to bring our cultures to the reconciliation table. But, until this is done, we can not begin to heal the age-old wounds of racist oppression. We can't even begin while insult is being rubbed into injury.

American Indian Movement (AIM)

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

180 GOLF CLUB Rd. #208

PLEASANT HILL, CA. 94523

510) 609-8517

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P.O. BOX 65155

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SUPPORT AMERICAN INDIANS

By writing to the professional sports teams
NO MORE MASCOTS

The use of demeaning and derogatory (cartoon caricatures) that are used to portray American Indians as mascots must be abolished from all professional and school sports. NOW! We are not honored by being designated mascots of a sports team. The Owners, Presidents and Commissioners are making a profit from this arrant ethnocentric insensitivity and disregard towards the American Indian people. It is time to change these insulting names and demeaning images. Let your voice be heard. Write to these teams and demand that they put a stop to this racist oppression towards a people that comes from a rich culture and heritage.



Major League Baseball
Bud Selig, Commissioner
350 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10022
212/ 339-7800

Atlanta Braves
Ted Turner, Owner
1 CNN Ctr Box 105366
Atlanta, GA 30348-5366
404/522-7630

Cleveland Indians
Richard Jacobs, President
2401 Ontario Street
Cleveland, OH 44115
216/420-4200

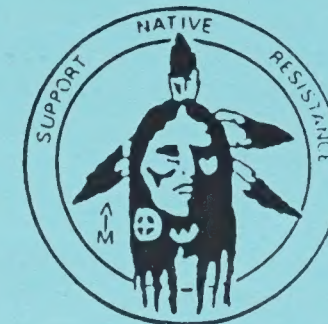
National Hockey League
1251 Ave of the Americas
New York, NY 10020
212/789-2000

National Football League
Paul Tagliabue, Commissioner
280 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10017
212/450-2000

Washington Redskins
Jack Kent Cooke, Owner
21300 Redskin Park Drive
Ashburn, VA 22011
703/478-8900

Kansas City Chiefs
Carl Peterson, President
1 Arrowhead Drive
Kansas City, MO 64129

Chicago Blackhawks
William Wertz, President
1901 W. Madison
Chicago, IL 60612
312/455-7000



AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT

Northern California
180 Golf Club Road #208
Pleasant Hill, CA. 94523
510 674-0194 Stormy
510 609-8517 Carole

"SQUAW"

NAME CHANGE PROJECT

The word "Squaw" comes from the original language of the Indigenous People (Mohawk) of this land, and translates as meaning female genitalia. By the continuous use of this word it portrays the sexual objectification of all women and of American Indian women in particular. This word has been used continuously through out Euro-American culture with derogatory implications towards the American Indian women. This is apparent with the 19th-century dime novels and in 20th-century movies that have helped promote two main stereotype, of the Indian princess or the Indian "Squaw."

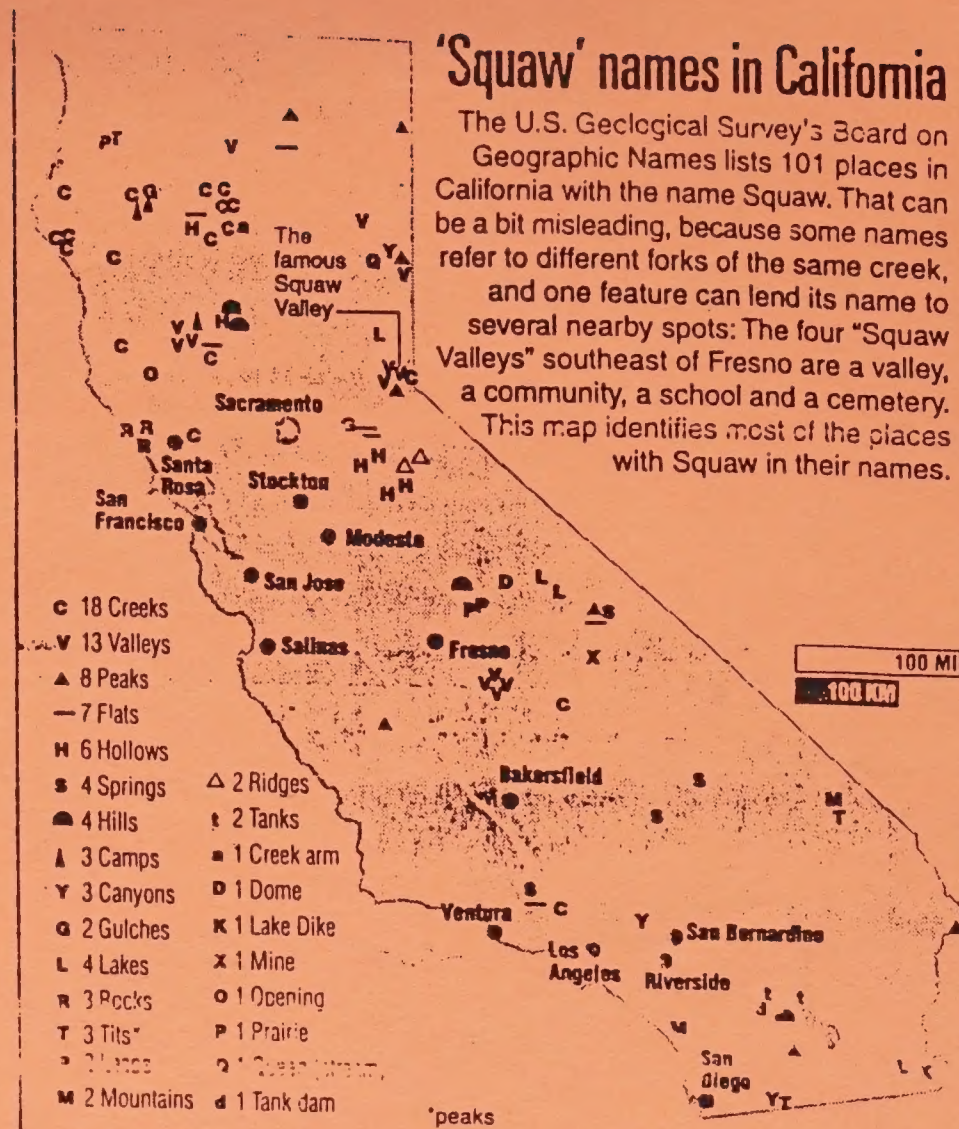
The American Indian Movement of Northern and Southern California have commenced the process of petitioning to have this word eliminated from the state maps. Efforts by other American Indians communities in the states of Minnesota, Montana and Arizona to remove this demeaning and derogatory name from geographic locations, has already begun. There has been some triumphs in their attempt.

We have received a listing from the United States Board on Geographic Names that identifies 103 sites in California that contain the name "Squaw." A request for name change of each geographic location must be submitted separately before the U.S. Board on Geographic Names in Virginia. Then it will be transferred to the Domestic Name Change Committee of California, waiting approval or denial. The petition must also include an alternate name to replace the one already in use. The committee does not make this decision of what to rename the site. We (AIM of California) have decided that we will seek out the surrounding tribe or tribes of the area in question, to complete this part of the name change petition.

Along with the efforts to change the state maps, AIM has begun a campaign to educate the American public that this word does not honor American Indian women.

'Squaw' names in California

The U.S. Geological Survey's Board on Geographic Names lists 101 places in California with the name Squaw. That can be a bit misleading, because some names refer to different forks of the same creek, and one feature can lend its name to several nearby spots: The four "Squaw Valleys" southeast of Fresno are a valley, a community, a school and a cemetery. This map identifies most of the places with Squaw in their names.



"SQUAW" NAME CHANGE PROJECT

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PHOTOGRAPH BY RON HUNTER

Save Ward Valley

*A collection of articles on the proposed Ward Valley radioactive waste dump.
Produced by the Ward Valley Coalition and the Bay Area Nuclear (BAN) Waste
Coalition. Printed by Inkworks, Berkeley, California. To order more copies, call
the BAN Waste Coalition at (415) 752-8678/(415) 868-2146.*

Defenders of the Sacred

Ech Kah Nav Cha
Pipah Aha Macav

by Steve Lopez
Mojave Indian

The sun is rising over the mountain shedding light on the valley below. A beautiful, crisp, spring morning brings out one of the most important inhabitants who lives in the desert, KAH – PET, the desert tortoise. Traditional Mojave language speaks of KAH-PET through song cycles, in myths of legend, and naming of family clans. Now KAH- PET is making his presence felt again, in SILYAYE AHEACE, or what has been known to be a place called Ward Valley.

The Fort Mojave Indian Tribe has been embattled in a fight against the building of a low level nuclear waste dump for over ten years. The State of California and its Department of Health Services have chosen Ward Valley, California, 18 miles west of the city of Needles, and the Colorado River, as the site of their latest project to “dispose” of low level nuclear waste.

Ward Valley is a significant area to the Mojave

People because it is the home of the desert tortoise, which plays a significant role in the Mojave Creation story. This area is also named in the traveling songs that are sung by the Mojave as part of the oral history of what took place in the past.

Pipah Aha Macav, traditional name of the Mojave means “People who live along the water.” This name was given by the Creator to the Mojave with an endowment to be “protectors” or “guardians” of the River. From time immemorial this is what the Mojave have done. Now, another threat has risen from outside intrusion that has brought the Mojave People a battle that will not go away until it is defeated. The present day enemy is low level radioactive waste!

The Fort Mojave Indian Tribe is a federally-recognized Indian Nation. A self-determining, sovereign government, formed under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, which resides on 42,000 acres, more or less, in the tri-state area of California, Arizona and Nevada. Even before this, the United States established Fort Mojave as an Indian reservation by Presidential Executive Order in 1895. The Colorado River flows right through the heart of the reservation. In 1964, the Supreme Court adjudicated 129,000 acre feet of Colorado River water to the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe as present perfected water rights. This means that the

Mojaves used the River first!

The siting of the proposed nuclear waste dump in Ward Valley poses a great risk to the Colorado River and threatens the perpetual life of the Mojave. The State of California has hired an infamous nuclear dump company, US Ecology, as the dump contractor and operator. This company has a history of leaking nuclear waste dumps all across the country and has continuously made claim that all of their dump projects are safe. This company definitely speaks with the proverbial "forked tongue."

The plans for the Ward Valley proposal is to dump long-lived nuclear waste in unlined dirt trenches in 55 gallon drums for a period of thirty years. This is what the California Department of Health Services, and US Ecology is calling high-tech methods of "disposal."

Fort Mojave tribal leaders have looked into the data regarding these methods, reviewed the historical past record of US Ecology's management, discovered the ultimate waste stream that would be sent to Ward Valley, looked at hydrological analysis with relationship to the pathways that empty water into the Colorado River, and refuse to believe any claims by the State of California or US Ecology that the Mojave will not be subject to the risk of radioactive contamination.

Furthermore, the risk of radioactive contamination to the Colorado River is an eminent threat. The River is the foundation base of economy for the Fort Mojave, Chemehuevi, Cocopah, Quechan and Colorado River Indian Tribes. All these sovereign nations hold major water rights that are used for agriculture, domestic, recreational and economic development. This now escalates to the 20 million Colorado River water users of the southwest including northern Mexico that would be at risk from this proposed facility.

The Fort Mojave opposition to the siting of this dump project has not changed over the past ten years and is very simple and clear:

"This nuclear waste dump project is a threat to our People and is a threat to the River that is our life's blood! We will not let this project kill our People, no matter what it takes to stop it from being built."

Ward Valley is also the sacred home of KAH –

PET, the Mojave desert tortoise. His home is listed as critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act. But even without Congress' law, it represents a significant spiritual bond that ties Mojave culture, tradition and identity to our brother, who once was a Mojave when the Great Spirit Mutavilya created all things. KAH – PET was given the instruction by Mutavilya to teach the the Mojave about the use of plants for sickness. Mojave shamans learn from him to heal those Mojaves who were ill. These shamans traveled to SILYAYE AHEACE to harvest those special medicines.

The sacredness CANNOT be mitigated or quantified by any means whatsoever, especially by those who refuse to understand and respect what the Mojave believe.

This belief is shared by the Quechan, Cocopah, Chemehuevi and Colorado River Indian Tribes. Thus, the Tribes have united and formed the Colorado River Native Nations Alliance to oppose the proposed dump project. Collectively, tribal leaders have taken this fight to Washington, D. C. to remind the Department of the Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt that he must keep the obligation that the United States government has as fiduciary responsibility to protect the health and well being of those in trust.

Tribal leaders have asked Secretary Babbitt to refuse to transfer the land from federal ownership over to the State of California, siting trust responsibility, breach of Nation to Nation consultation, Executive Orders 13007 and 12898, Indian Sacred Sites and Environmental Justice, respectively.

Moreover, the Alliance has asked President Bill Clinton to intervene and direct Secretary Babbitt to once and for all terminate the land transfer to stop any proposed nuclear waste dump from construction in Ward Valley, now and in the future.

Many issues are fought in this battle, however, the Indian Nations simply see this as a common sense blindness. We are common People who have the sense enough to see that this project is no good, and those who want this project built are blinded by their own greed and ignorance.

This WAR will be WON by WARRIORS! Aw-hot

Ward Valley: Sacred Homeland, Critical Habitat for a Threatened Species or Nuclear Waste Dump?

The Ten Year Battle Over the Proposed Ward Valley Nuclear Waste Dump Reaches Toward Decision

by Philip M. Klasky

In the Mojave Desert, periodic windstorms scour the landscape and polish the stars in the night sky. Outside the Avi Hotel and Casino on the banks of the Colorado River the wind is blowing with ferocity. Huge flags of the United States of America, the State of California and the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe strain at their tether. Long ropes whip their poles in a furious cadence. Tumble weeds dance helplessly across the sand, and a raven, buffeted by gusts, takes refuge in a thicket of mesquite trees.

Inside the hotel, a meeting between representatives of the lower Colorado River Indian Tribes and the federal government is coming to a close. Tribal leaders take turns expressing their adamant opposition to the proposal for a radioactive waste dump at Ward Valley in an area next to their reservations and on land considered sacred aboriginal territory. The Tribal leaders speak with a dignified and urgent eloquence and explain that they will not and cannot move from a place they have inhabited "since time immemorial."

They speak of their profound and solemn relationship with the natural landscape, the plants, animals, and water. They explain that the dump would threaten the desert tortoise and the Colorado River and endanger their health and economic future. They describe how the dump proposal would violate their sovereignty and environmental justice mandates. They demand that the government stop the ill-conceived dump project.

A Mohave elder rises to speak. As she sings a traditional song describing her people's tie to the land, even the most disaffected bureaucrats take notice and listen. But do they hear? I look around the room, across a great cultural chasm and wonder how these government representatives, influenced by political pressure and cultural bias, will be able to understand the elder's vital relationship with the land and the depth of commitment and resistance by those who oppose the dump.

Ward Valley is a wide tilting valley in the southeast corner of California's east Mojave Desert. The proposed dump site is surrounded by eight wilderness areas and in the midst of critical habitat for the threatened desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*). Nearby are the pristine golden canyons and cave paintings of the Old Woman Mountains. To the east, the foothills of the Stepladder Mountains are covered in a forest of cholla cactus. Ward Valley is home to golden

eagles and red-tailed hawks, sidewinders and tortoises, song birds and coyotes, jack rabbits and kit fox. In the Spring and Fall, wildflowers carpet the ground with chicory, sunflower and dandelions. Smoke tree and screwbean mesquite line the washes and during monsoon showers, a wall of water six feet high can speed down the water courses.

America's nuclear power industry, anxious to rid itself of the long-lived and highly-dangerous radioactive wastes at their power plant sites, has launched a political campaign to open a national dump site at Ward Valley. The industry has directed Governor Pete Wilson to pursue plans to bury radioactive wastes in shallow, unlined trenches above an aquifer, 18 miles from the Colorado River and in an area considered sacred to the five lower Colorado River Indian tribes.

The industry has been engaged in a well-financed public relations campaign to present the dump as a safe and remote repository for short-lived medical wastes. However, according to Department of Energy statistics, 85 percent of the waste slated for Ward Valley would come from nuclear reactors. A very small portion of the waste, less than 15 percent by volume and less than 1 percent by radioactivity, would come from medical sources. Most of this kind of waste is short-lived and can be safely and economically stored where it is generated.

Scientists with the United States Geological Survey have identified five subsurface pathways by which nuclear wastes leaking from the Ward Valley site would reach the Colorado River — source of water for 22 million people in the Southwest and Mexico.

For the last ten years, a diverse coalition of environmental and social justice organizations, Native American tribes and indigenous environmental networks, city and county governments and citizen's groups have been battling the dump in the courts, in the media and on the ground. Environmental groups and Indian Tribes have notified the federal government that any attempt at a land transfer would trigger a lawsuit asserting the protections of the Endangered Species Act. Similar litigation in 1993 stopped a federal land transfer and led to the designation of 6.4 million acres of critical habitat for the desert tortoise.

The greatest threat to Ward Valley comes from Congress. Senator Frank Murkowski (R-AK) and Representative Don Young (R-AK)

have introduced legislation which would force a federal land transfer at Ward Valley and exempt the dump from all existing environmental regulations. The maneuver would preclude the public's right to challenge the dump in the courts.

The legislation would circumvent Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, a potent part of the law which defines the protections afforded critical habitat, paving the way for a dump in a healthy ecosystem considered essential for the recovery and conservation of an endangered species. Other laws, such as the National Environmental Policy Act and the Clean Water Act would be cast aside for political expediency. Attempts to place a Ward Valley rider onto the Budget Bill failed last year as activists launched a national outreach campaign that sent tens of thousands of letters and telephone calls to the White House. President Clinton vetoed the Budget Bill and cited the Ward Valley rider as one of his reasons. Murkowski and his allies in Congress have pledged to try to transfer the land again this session and the Clinton administration has yet to take a decisive stand on the issue.

For ten years, the State of California, working closely with the nuclear power industry, has been attempting to build a nuclear waste dump at Ward Valley. Ward Valley is on federal land administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The 1980 Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act directs the states to take responsibility for the waste generated within their borders by forming regional compacts. California is in the Southwestern Compact with Arizona, North Dakota and South Dakota. However, the law does not specify the method of waste containment and many states have outlawed shallow land burial.

The land at Ward Valley must be transferred to the State of California before the dump can be built since the State is the licensing agent. The land transfer would encompass 1,000 acres, ample room for a national dump site. Dump opponents believe that plans are to turn Ward Valley into a national repository for the nuclear waste from America's aging reactors. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has unilateral emergency access powers to direct waste to any open dump and the Southwestern Compact Commission, administered by gubernatorial appointees from the compact states, has already voted to accept out-of-compact waste.

Governor Wilson has selected a notorious waste management firm

as the dump contractor. US Ecology, formerly Nuclear Engineering Corporation, has left a trail of leaking dumps and litigation across the country. Their nuclear dumps at Sheffield, Illinois; Maxey Flats, Kentucky; Richland, Washington and Beatty, Nevada are leaking dangerous radioactive materials into the surrounding ecosystem. Two of their toxic waste dumps are Superfund sites.

US Ecology has insisted that they have learned their lesson from their leaking waste dumps in the eastern (wetter) part of the country and has asserted that a desert dump would never leak. They offered as an example their Beatty, Nevada, nuclear landfill with the same design as the Ward Valley proposal.

Last year, it was disclosed that a scientist on contract with US Ecology failed to disclose data which revealed that radioactive materials had migrated 360 feet below the Beatty site and was marching inexorably toward ground water ten feet away. This revelation caused

Deputy Secretary of the Interior John Garamendi to call for a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to explore new information which has surfaced since the original Environmental Impact Statement in 1991. Dump opponents fear that the SEIS will only serve to delay a decision on the dump project. There is already ample evidence to conclude that the proposal at Ward Valley would contaminate the ecosystem.

Dump opponents have recommended that the SEIS explore alternatives to shallow land burial; analyze the waste stream slated for Ward Valley; honor Native American land, water, cultural, religious and sovereignty rights; recognize that the dump violates environmental justice mandates; and acknowledge the adverse impacts of the proposed project on the threatened desert tortoise. Other issues include the danger from the transport of nuclear wastes; financial liability for waste containment; the health effects of radiation exposure; and emergency preparedness. But, environ-

mental impact statements are designed to mitigate projects, not stop them.

Shallow land burial of radioactive wastes results in contamination of the soil, air and water. All six of America's commercial nuclear landfills are leaking. There are environmentally and economically sustainable alternatives to shallow land burial of nuclear wastes. In fact, with on-site storage capacity to store most medical, research and biotech radioactive wastes until they decay, a nuclear dump is not needed. Most medical radionuclides are short-lived and decay in weeks, months or years. A small percentage of the waste generated by medical research and biotech companies is long-lived and should be stored in more permanent facilities such as decommissioned nucle-

Attempts to place a Ward Valley rider onto the Budget Bill failed last year as activists launched a national outreach campaign that sent tens of thousands of letters and telephone calls to the White House.

ar power plants.

Currently, both long-lived waste from nuclear power reactors and short-lived waste from medical research and biotech industries are put in the same "low-level" waste category. In other countries, what the Nuclear Regulatory Commission defines as "low-level" is categorized as "intermediate" or "high-level" depending on toxicity and longevity. This manipulation of language creates misconceptions of the dangers of so-called "low-level" wastes. Cesium and strontium, which remain deadly for up to 300 years, and plutonium, which remains toxic for 250,000 years are called "high-level" waste when they are in the reactor core. Once sifted out into filter resins they are re-classified as "low-level."

According to the operating license, the proposed dump could receive 120 pounds of plutonium and tons of contaminated reactor parts from the Diablo Canyon, San Onofre, Humboldt Bay, Rancho Seco and the Palo Verde nuclear power plants.

Instead of creating a mixed brew of wastes from reactors and medical research facilities, radioactive waste should be segregated by longevity and treated accordingly. Reactor waste should be kept in long-term monitored, retrievable storage (MRS) facilities on-site wherever safe. A redundant monitoring system would detect leakages before they migrate into the surrounding area and retrievable storage mechanisms would remove leaking waste containers to repair or replace them. Leachate collection systems would collect leaking waste before they migrate off-site.

The initial costs of a MRS facility may be higher than a shallow grave in the desert, but the ultimate costs of contamination of the environment and public exposure to cancer-causing agents is difficult to calculate or quantify. US Ecology, financially troubled and beleaguered by lawsuits, is finding out that irresponsible waste containment technologies are more costly when public opposition becomes a significant factor. The use of public lands for a nuclear waste dump represents a government subsidy of the nuclear power industry by externalizing the costs associated with nuclear power generation.

So far, the government has attempted to limit public opinion and finesse scientific review. At the initial SEIS scoping workshops in Sacramento the Bureau of Land Management prohibited oral testimony. This stand led to a confrontation with activists who took over the meeting and conducted a public hearing placing oral testimony into the administrative record. Testimony by dump opponents during hearings by the National Academy of Sciences was strictly limit-

ed in favor of presentations by dump proponents. The process to date has not instilled much confidence that the SEIS will be an objective study.

The Fort Mojave, Chemehuevi, Cocopah, Quechan and Colorado River Indian Tribes, unified as the Colorado River Native Nations Alliance, have requested status as a "cooperating agency" in the SEIS process. This designation would give the tribes an opportunity to be directly involved in the drafting, scope and analysis of the final SEIS document. In this way, the Colorado River Native Nations Alliance could more directly assert the importance of Ward Valley and the desert tortoise to indigenous culture, religious and economic interests.

Bureau of Land Management State Director Ed Hastey rejected their request. In doing so, Hastey has violated environmental justice mandates which invite Indian tribes to obtain this special status so that they may fully participate in land-use planning processes and protect their interests. The bitter history of the government's exploitation of Indian lands continues with the dump proposal.

Responding to the decision to deny them access to the SEIS process, Fort Mojave tribal leader Steve Lopez remarked, "First they force us off our traditional lands and put us on reservations, then they accuse us of living off the government. We want to be self-sufficient, we want to be able to farm our lands and now, after threatening to poison our land and our water, they refuse to recognize our rights."

In 1994, President Clinton signed the Executive Order on Environmental Justice recognizing that low-income and communities of color suffer disproportionately from environmental hazards. The Order designated the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as the lead federal agency for implementation of guidelines to achieve environmental justice in all federal actions. Other agencies, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Land Management and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service are required to consider their actions in relation to environmental justice concerns. Last year, at the urging of the Colorado River Native Nations Alliance (Fort Mojave, Chemehuevi, Cocopah, Quechan and Colorado River Indian Tribes), a subcommittee of the EPA's National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (NEJAC) designated the dump proposal as an environmental justice issue and called for an environmental justice impact analysis. The Tribes have asserted repeatedly that the dump project would violate their human rights and have called upon the EPA to

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halt the project.

The Pipa Aha Macav, People Along the River (Mojave/Mohave) and the Nuwuvi, The People (Chemehuevi) peoples, whose traditional territory surround and include Ward Valley, have a profound and solemn relationship with the land and the natural landscape. Their Birds Songs are oral maps used to describe the location of resources in relation to seasons and landmarks in aboriginal times when successful travel was dependent upon the availability of food and water. Migratory birds described in the songs in association with a particular place indicated the best season in which to travel there. The songs tell creation stories, recount historic travels, traditional lore and cultural lessons. The Bird Songs are also used in ceremonies and special events.

The geographic narratives of the Mohave and Chemehuevi people follow traditional travel routes throughout the Mojave and Sonoran Desert Regions, the Colorado Plateau and extend as far as the Pacific Coast and the Gulf of Mexico.

The desert tortoise is an ancient species remaining relatively unchanged for the last 65 million years. It can live as long as a century and can spend 90 percent of its life in its burrow. When the winter cold or blistering summer heat visits the desert, the tortoise hibernates in a burrow 30 feet down into the ground. The tortoise can slow down its metabolism as it waits for the spring and fall burst of annual plants. This magnificent survivor is seriously at risk of extinction. In the last seven years, tortoise populations have been cut in half due to habitat destruction and the introduction of the fatal upper respiratory tract

disease (URTD) into wild populations. The government has presented two faces as regards the protection of desert tortoise habitat. On one hand, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has designated Ward Valley as the best of the best desert tortoise critical habitat. On the other hand, political pressure has led the Service to issue a "no jeopardy" decision, claiming that the dump project would not harm the tortoise even though critical habitat would be destroyed.

US Ecology has proposed a mitigation plan whereby tortoises found in the way of bulldozers would be simply killed or relocated to another area north of the site. They argue that the project would actually help the tortoise by reclaiming habitat previously uninhabited. Translocation of wild tortoises has been shown to result in disorientation and death. Tortoises at Ward Valley are free from URTD and represent one of the last healthy wild populations. The mitigation plan would move the tortoises closer to an infected population.

It is hard to imagine how US Fish and Wildlife Service staff could approve a project that would destroy critical habitat, wrench tortoises from their burrows, invite nuclear waste to an area near the Colorado River and move healthy tortoises into a diseased population.

The desert tortoise possesses special significance for the Mohave and Chemehuevi people who consider the creature a sacred teacher and essential part of their culture and landscape.

Opposition to the dump is strong and growing. Public opinion polls conducted by independent researchers found that 70 percent of Californians oppose the dump, 80 percent oppose shallow land burial

of radioactive wastes, but unfortunately only 30 percent know about the issue. A diverse coalition of nuclear scientists, medical professionals, economists, community activists, city and county governments, environmental, social justice, wilderness protection, indigenous rights and endangered species organizations and Native American leaders have been working to protect Ward Valley. Their efforts are more than a political campaign. The struggle to protect Ward Valley has accumulated to become a movement linking environmental and social justice issues.

Spring and fall gatherings at Ward Valley have attracted hundreds of people. These special events include strategy sessions, informational workshops and the sharing of culture. Sunrise ceremonies by a Shoshone Indian leader, Quechan Indian storytelling, prayer rituals by Indian elders, traditional Mojave

gourd songs and bird dances, Aztec dancers from Mexico, and Spirit Runs (traditional relay runs across the desert) accompany workshops on radioactive waste, desert ecology, community organizing, non-violence and political strategy. In the fall of 1995, a group of activists began a permanent occupation of the site which continues to this day.

The on-going occupation of the proposed dump site has attracted national media and has inspired many to come to visit this remote corner of the Mojave desert. The tents, banners and portable toilets have become potent symbols of the resistance. Hundreds have pledged to come at a moment's notice (contacted through an emergency response network) to defend the land. Indian elders have vowed to confront the bulldozers if necessary.

The campaign to save Ward Valley will come to head in the next few months. Murkowski will introduce stealth legislation in the coming Congressional session and the draft SEIS will be out later this year.

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The time is now to send an uncompromising message to the White House that the proposal for a nuclear dump in the California desert must be rejected once and for all. California Senator Dianne Feinstein and Vice-President Al Gore have refused to take a stand on the issue. Senator Barbara Boxer has shown great courage fighting the project in Congress.

The latest development involves the proposal for testing at the site to determine if buried radioactive wastes would reach the ground water and the Colorado River. Previous tests conducted by US Ecology discovered the presence of tritium (radioactive hydrogen) 100 feet below the surface. The source of the tritium was the above ground nuclear weapons tests at the Nevada Test Site. The discovery cast doubt on US Ecology's assertion that buried wastes would take thousands of years to reach area aquifers. Testing involves highly sensitive instruments searching for minute traces of tritium particles in the desert soil. Widely different test results can be found depending on the method of drilling, sample collection, the particular areas selected for drilling, calibration of the instruments, and the techniques used in analysis of the results. In other words, the whole process is extremely vulnerable to manipulation.

Deputy Secretary of the Interior John Garamendi proposed conducting tests at Ward Valley as part of an ongoing environmental impact analysis and selected two experts from the National Academy of Sciences to develop protocols. US Ecology then threatened to sue the scientists and succeeded in halting the process. Garamendi denounced US Ecology's tactics as "raw intimidation," but offered a compromise to conduct the tests with the state of California. Wilson refused and directed the Department of Health Services to develop plans to do their own testing. Wilson and US Ecology then sued the Interior Department to get their hands on the federal land at Ward Valley and Senator Dianne Feinstein threatened to support federal legislation that would force a land transfer and exempt the dump from all environmental regulations if Garamendi did not cooperate. Wilson then demanded that the state Department of Health Services (DHS) and the Department of Energy (DOE) do the testing. Neither the DHS nor DOE are impartial actors in the controversy. The DHS has been an aggressive advocate for the dump and the DOE has a regulatory mandate to support the project. The DOI has preserved the option to do their own testing. The situation is changing day to day as political expediency takes the reins in the vacuum of leadership.

Instead of gambling with present and future generations with corruptible tests, the Clinton Administration should show leadership and cancel the ill-conceived project on its face. Costly lessons have

shown that shallow land burial of nuclear wastes results in contamination of the environment. Critical habitat for the desert tortoise must be protected if we can expect the ancient species to recover from years of abuse and the federal government has a trust responsibility to protect the resources of Native American tribes.

This Spring activists will gather at Ward Valley to develop a strategy to end the protracted battle. Our challenges will be to defeat Congressional attempts to transfer the land, assert environmental justice in the courts, protect critical habitat and wilderness, demand accountability from our elected officials and continue to educate and involve the public. We must plan for non-violent direct action should

Congress and the Administration bow to the influence of the nuclear power industry. We will need to expand our broad coalition of groups to include more mainstream environmental organizations and local residents, and build more cross-cultural alliances. In the midst of all the assaults on nature, we can be sustained by a common vision of a healthy environment, protected wilderness and respect for traditional cultures.

Philip M. Klasky is a writer, teacher and co-director of the Bay Area Nuclear (BAN) Waste Coalition. For more information on how you can help protect Ward Valley call (415) 752-8678. or (415) 868-2146.

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The Bay Area Nuclear Waste Coalition

In 1991, when the public became aware of government efforts to designate Ward Valley as a nuclear dumpsite, the Bay Area Nuclear Waste (BAN) Coalition was formed. The Coalition works closely with a diverse network of environmental and social justice groups and Native American tribes.

The BAN Waste Coalition is working to stop the proposal for a nuclear waste dump at Ward Valley while promoting source reduction of nuclear wastes, responsible methods of waste containment, wilderness preservation, protection of endangered species and protection of indigenous rights.

Toward these goals, the Coalition engages in in-depth research, provides expert testimony, employs community organizing and legal strategies and seeks to reach out and educate the public and decision-makers on the Ward Valley and related issues.

www.banwaste.envirolink.org

Resistance on the Ground

by Tori Woodard

Nobody's Wasteland protest camp in Ward Valley made headlines again on January 31, 1997, when Governor Wilson asked Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to evict the camp so that the California State Department of Health Services (DHS) can test at the site and get the nuclear waste dump project back on track. At their annual conference the next day, approximately fifty groups in the Ward Valley Coalition agreed to nonviolently defend the site if the Bureau of Land Management tries to evict the camp.

Wilson's announcement came only two days after the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe organized a dramatic demonstration in Ward Valley. For one and a half hours on January 29, Native Americans and others blocked the road and prevented a Department of Energy committee from touring the proposed dump site. The event caught the attention of the media.

On January 31 protestors took over a meeting of the Southwestern Compact Commission in Needles. For six hours the Commission listened to testimony from dump opponents, rather than proceeding with their own agenda to move the dump project forward. Finally DHS got the floor to announce that they had sued the Department of the Interior that afternoon to transfer the land to California for construction of the dump. They also announced that Wilson wants to evict the camp. You should have been there.

Nobody's Wasteland camp was started by participants in a large encampment at Ward Valley in October 1995, and

has been a thorn in the side of dump proponents ever since. It inspired national media coverage of the Ward Valley issue for the first time, including feature articles last year in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Business Week.

The camp hosted a large Spiritual Gathering in December 1995 organized by the Mohave Elders Committee and the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe. We have had many visitors, including Japanese hibakusha (nuclear bomb survivors) and elected representatives from Mexico, and have hosted several runs and walks. On February 8-11, 1997, Quechan Indian runners ran 200 miles on ancient trails from the Fort Yuma-Quechan Reservation in Southern California to Ward Valley. Taiwanese anti-nuclear activists will visit April 1.

The Save Ward Valley office in nearby Needles, California, conducts local outreach and has co-coordinated several large gatherings in Ward Valley. Our latest was the Children's Fall Gathering in November 1996, where 75 children learned traditional Mojave and Chemehuevi language, beading, bow and arrow construction from local vegetation, hut building, photography, the life cycle of the desert tortoise, and the effects of radiation on the Yakima Nation in the state of Washington. We are now gearing up for our largest gathering April 25-27, 1997.

Last year Save Ward Valley organized panel discussions and a poster contest, and mobilized hundreds of people to attend government hearings. We give presentations in local schools, show

videos to civic and church groups, and educate people on the Internet about Ward Valley.

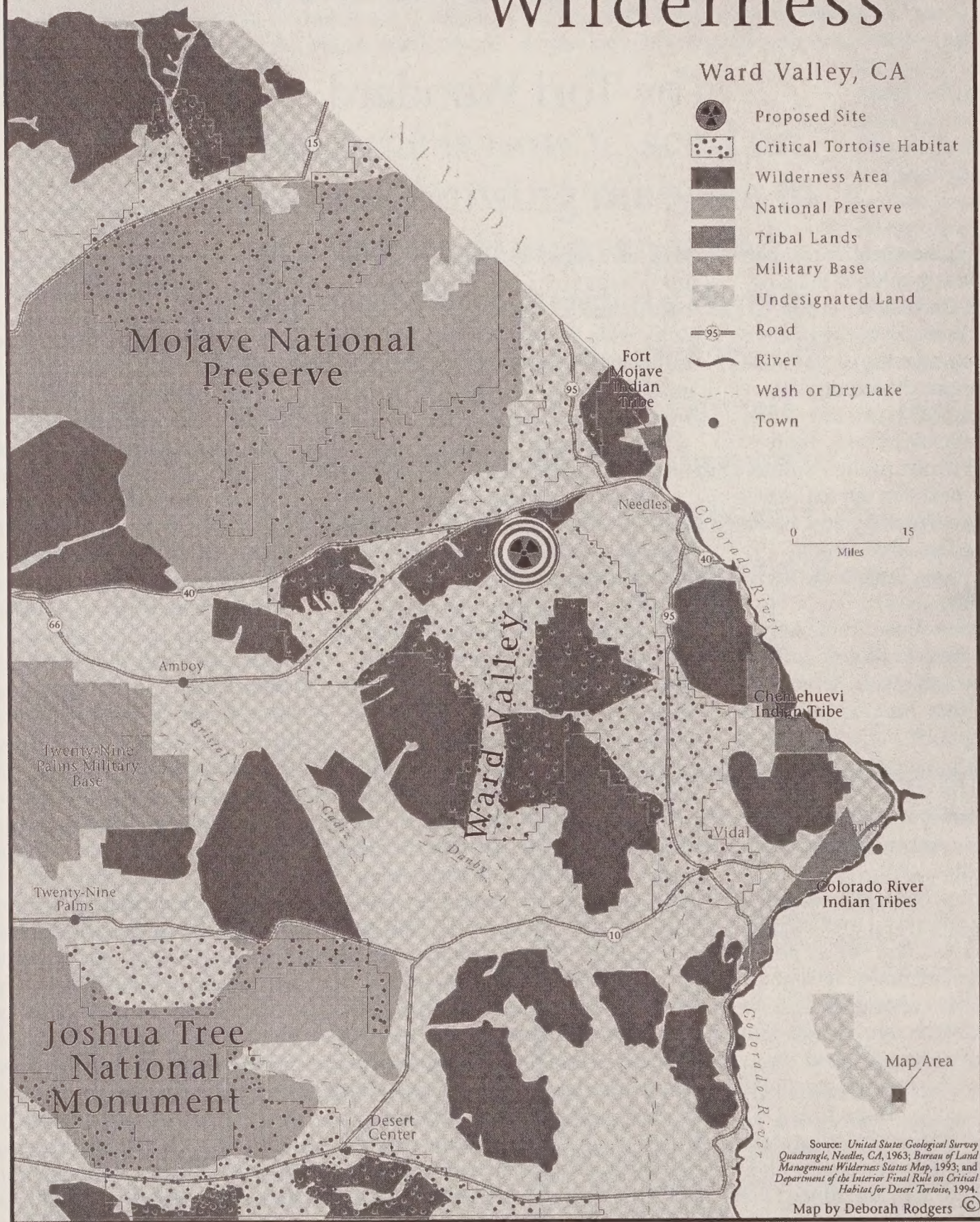
Both the office and the camp are sponsored by the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Greenpeace, and the Bay Area Nuclear Waste Coalition. We work closely with all the Tribes in the Colorado River Native Nations Alliance, formed to oppose any radioactive waste facility in Ward Valley. We publish a newsletter for the Ward Valley Coalition: to receive a sample copy call us at (619) 326-6267.

Due to the eviction threat, it is crucial now to keep the vigil in Ward Valley twenty-four hours a day. We need a few good people to share our nonviolent, drug- and alcohol-free desert experience for a weekend, a week, or longer. Come camp on the very spot where the nuclear industry wants to dig sixty-foot deep unlined trenches for radioactive waste.

Because the status of the proposed dump constantly changes, please contact the Save Ward Valley office if you are interested in helping to keep the vigil. We have an application procedure for new campers. We find our happiest campers are self-sufficient, have their own transportation and camping gear, and are willing to volunteer.

The East Mojave Desert is majestic. The air is clean, the water (from a 700-foot-deep well) tastes great, our vistas are grand, and this spring the comet Hale-Bopp is moving across the sky. What better time or place to take a stand against the desecration of our Mother Earth?

Nuclear Waste in the Wilderness



Notes on the Desert Tortoise

by Robert Stebbins, Ph.D.

The desert tortoise is in a precipitous and accelerating decline throughout much of its range in the United States. Unless present trends change, the tortoise appears to be headed for extinction in many areas. This venerable desert animal, admired and loved by many, is an indicator of the health of desert ecosystems and is now caught in a human pincers movement. Mounting human intrusions are spreading from metropolitan areas in the eastern and western periphery of the species' range toward the more remote parts of the central desert which are located chiefly in eastern California. Ward Valley is perhaps the most pristine part of the remaining natural refugium. The Valley is an integral portion of the Bureau of Land Management's Chemehuevi Desert Wildlife Management Area and has been designated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) as "critical habitat" for the recovery of the tortoise in the United States. Nevertheless, the Service has recommended a "no jeopardy" opinion as to the impact of the Ward Valley nuclear dump on the tortoise, probably because it could not say that the dump would be the final blow to the animal's survival.

I believe the Service and the dump proponents have greatly underestimated the risk to the tortoise posed by the dump and I find proposed mitigation plans inadequate to compensate for possible damage. My concerns have been expressed to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and to the Bureau of Land Management, but I have received no response from them.

The focus by these agencies has been on possible local impacts of the dump on the tortoise. However, I expect

impacts will extend far beyond the facility's boundaries because of the destruction of habitat, the inevitable introduction and spread of weeds, and the persistent attraction of predators and scavengers (such as ravens, kit foxes, and coyotes) to the array of dead, dying, and displaced animals that will result from decades of ground-breaking and other human activities at the site.

With the operation of the dump, two factors will ensure a significant increase in the introduction of weeds to the area. Chronic ground disturbances, prolonged increase in vehicular travel to the area, and disposal vehicles that travel through the western desert to reach Ward Valley will all contribute to the spread of weeds.

Major changes to the ecology of the western desert have occurred as a result of extensive weed introduction associated with desert surfaces disturbed by off-road vehicle recreation, grazing, road construction, subdivision developments and other human activities. Exotic plant species displace native species upon which tortoises feed. Although some exotics appear to be acceptable forage for tortoises, others provide poor nutrition or may pose threats due to toxins or sharp awns. Some, such as the mustard (*Brassica tournefortii*), are now spreading rapidly in the western desert; others such as Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), form almost a monoculture in places, interfering with tortoise movements. Some weeds are fire prone, and can burn out native perennials important as food sources and shelter for tortoises. Fires, rare prior to weed introductions in the desert, can shift desert vegetation from shrubland to grassland, to the detriment of the tortoise and

other desert-adapted wildlife. If weeds became established in Homer Wash (a large tributary through Ward Valley), it could act as a conduit carrying additional exotic plants into the heart of the valley.

I believe the dump will act as a chronic drain on tortoise populations at Ward Valley and in the surrounding area. This will result not only because of increased mortality from accidental kills and injuries associated with the increased human activity but also through increased predation and habitat fragmentation. The dump will act much like a heavily traveled highway, continually thinning the tortoise populations around it. However, the actual drain on tortoise populations may extend much further. The dump would become a mortality "sink" as tortoises are lost in areas surrounding the facility.

The dump project requires the transfer of a thousand acres of public land to the State of California, yet the dump currently proposes to use only one-tenth of that total. Will the present facility be a first step in the development of a much larger waste repository at Ward Valley? A thousand acres could accommodate nine more installations of the size of the present one. I believe critical habitat for the tortoise will be significantly jeopardized if the dump is established in Ward Valley.

Robert C. Stebbins, Ph. D. is emeritus professor of zoology and emeritus curator of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at UC Berkeley.

Geology Of Ward Valley

By Howard Wilshire and Jane Nielson

Ward Valley has a long geologic history, but many of the valley's geological facets relevant to nuclear waste dump siting are of quite recent origin. About 10 to 20 million years ago, as the San Andreas Fault began to move and volcanoes erupted in the Berkeley Hills, tectonic forces pulled the earth's crust apart in a belt that parallels the lower Colorado River. This event (known to geologists as "extension") shaped the present landscape. The lower part of the extending crust was relatively hot and therefore stretched (ductile deformation), to double its previous width. The cold and rigid upper crust shattered along near-vertical faults, allowing lava to erupt. The stretched lower plate and the brittle, fractured upper plate were separated by shallow sloping and undulating "detachment faults."

During extension the fault-bounded upper plate blocks tilted; gaps between them formed basins in which sediment and volcanic rock collected. After extension, the lower plate rebounded and exposed both detachment faults and stretched rocks in areas east of Ward Valley, such as the Sacramento Mountains. These detachment faults slope gently westward under the north end of Ward Valley at a depth of a few hundred feet, then rise to the surface in the eastern Piute Mountains. Tilted upper plate blocks and basin deposits fringe the west side of the Sacramento Mountains and form the highly faulted Mopah Range and Turtle Mountains at the southeastern margin of Ward Valley.

The choice of Ward Valley as a radioactive waste disposal site ignored many important aspects of the geologic setting. For example, alluvium (decomposed rock transported by seasonal streams and gravity) derived from Cretaceous granitic rocks in the Piute Mountains is especially well-suited as desert tortoise habitat. A more dangerous assumption was that the valley fill consists

of homogeneous, unfractured alluvial sediments, at least 800 feet deep. Assuming homogeneity allowed the physical properties of alluvium at the site to be mathematically modeled on the basis of very few measurements. The assumption that the materials are unfractured leads to a secondary assumption: that all water moving through the ground percolates evenly through the sediment. Most disposal sites for hazardous material have been evaluated using these same assumptions; however, at waste repository sites around the world human-produced contaminants are being discovered at much greater depths than models like the one used for Ward Valley would predict. Recent studies have focused on "preferred pathways" such as fractures, because water is transmitted much more rapidly through fractures when the ground is saturated.

Contrary to the assumptions used to model the site, actual geologic study of Ward Valley suggests that the alluvial fill is much less than 100 feet thick; construction of a pipeline a few miles south of the proposed dump site revealed granitic bedrock less than five feet down. Fractured sand, gravel, and volcanic rock, which accumulated in a basin in the upper plate during extension, are exposed near the proposed waste site in both the Little Piute and Sacramento Mountains. Seismic records obtained by the applicant suggest that such highly fractured rocks lie just under the proposed site; if so, the fractures could funnel water and contaminants to the water table under saturated conditions.

These saturated conditions now occur only locally during high rainfall, on an undetermined cycle: perhaps as short as decades, perhaps as long as centuries. Periods of high rainfall were not factored into the site assessment; instead the average annual rainfall at Needles was used to calculate water flow through the "unsaturated zone" (layers of soil and sediment above

the water table). Annual precipitation at Ward Valley is almost certainly greater than at Needles: the town is further from the Pacific and lies in a potential rainshadow of the Sacramento Mountain. Further, the rate of recharge of ground water in arid areas depends on the size of individual storms, not on the annual average.

Another important factor at the site is the flow of surface water to Ward Valley from drainages in nearby Lanfair Valley to the northwest. A low divide separates the south-flowing Ward Valley drainage from Sacramento Wash, which discharges surface water from Lanfair Valley eastward into the Colorado River valley. Examination of aerial photographs shows sediment from Lanfair Valley extending in plumes south of the present divide. To change the course of some Lanfair Valley drainages from Sacramento Wash to Ward Valley would take nothing more than a shovel and a few hours of diligent digging. Lanfair Valley drainages now going into Sacramento Wash could flow toward Ward Valley in a period of high rainfall. This would increase the catchment area used to calculate flood risk by a factor of about 25; a wider area catches more water.

More ominously, subsurface connections may exist between Ward Valley ground water and the Colorado River. Fractured and tilted upper plate rocks and detachment faults may lie at shallow depth beneath Ward Valley. Such rocks are exposed between Ward Valley and the Colorado River, a strong indication that they lie close to the surface in the Valley itself. If they do, contaminants in Ward Valley's ground water could flow into the Colorado River. Whether a groundwater connection to the Colorado River constitutes a significant risk depends on the actual (and highly disputed) composition of the waste intended for Ward Valley.

The Anatomy of Nuclear Waste

by Ernest Goitein

The low-level radioactive waste facility proposed for Ward Valley would accept power plant wastes as well as medical wastes. While medical wastes are short lived; power plant wastes are hazardous for thousands of years. Besides the fact that nuclear power is no longer economical, the problem of waste disposal for spent fuel and so called "low-level" waste has never been solved satisfactorily. This article explains where the nuclear power plant low-level wastes originate and defines some of the jargon.

There are several distinct sources of low-level radioactive waste from a nuclear power plant:

CORROSION PRODUCTS. Water is circulated around the core of the reactor. Minute quantities of corrosion products suspended in that water pass through the reactor and absorb neutrons, changing into radioactive isotopes. This process is called "activation."

A fraction of the water is circulated to a clean-up system where the corrosion products are removed by demineralizers (where contaminants are trapped in resin) and filters. The cleaned water is returned to the reactor system.

DECONTAMINATION. Corrosion products plate out on piping and equipment. This creates a radioactive crust, or scale, that endangers repair or maintenance workers. To dissolve this coating of radioactive corrosion products a decontamination process is used during plant outages. Decontamination consists of a series of flushes alternating oxi-

dizing mixtures (to loosen the scale) and chelating agents (to bind with and transport the loose scale). The radioactive decontamination flush is cleaned up by resin absorption in demineralizers.

DEFECTIVE FUEL ELEMENTS. The fuel consists of low-enriched uranium oxide (UO_2) pellets in a thin zirconium cladding. Each fuel element has a diameter approximately the size of a pencil. As the core heats up, the fuel swells and stresses the thin cladding. This can result in pinhole leaks in some of the fuel elements. Transuranics – elements such as neptunium, plutonium, americium and curium created when uranium absorbs neutrons – and the fission products – strontium, cesium, and iodine among them – leak into the core coolant and are absorbed by the resins in the clean up system.

These highly radioactive resins, containing the corrosion products as well as the fission products and transuranics from the leaking fuel elements are called low-level waste. They are hazardous for thousands of years, and are shipped to low level radioactive waste facilities.

The demineralizer resins and filters, highly radioactive and inappropriately defined as low level waste, are then packaged, usually in carbon steel drums. These would be sent to Ward Valley.

DECOMMISSIONING WASTES. Once a nuclear power plant is permanently shut down, the decommissioning process begins. Under the "safe store" concept, the equipment is left

undisturbed for 50 – 100 years to allow radiation levels to decay, and make disassembly less hazardous. Many utilities have chosen not to wait. Major equipment, such as pressurizers, pumps, steam generators, evaporators, heat exchangers and even reactor vessel internals have been shipped to low-level waste facilities. The hazardous life of these components extends for thousands of years.

GASEOUS WASTES. Radioactive gases are created by activation and by the fissioning process. These gases are normally compressed and stored for six months to allow for partial decay. They are then released to the "off-gas system," which filters out solid radioactive daughter products, such as strontium, barium and cesium. The gases are vented through a tall stack when the wind will disperse them. The filters are shipped to a low-level radioactive waste facility.

Alternative storage concepts

Low-level radioactive wastes, by NRC definition, include short lived medical wastes as well as power plant wastes hazardous for thousands of years.

These different wastes should not be treated in the same way, or stored in the same facility. Medical and bio-technical waste streams, which have half lives of 90 days or less, and are therefore hazardous for less than 3–5 years, should be placed in a state of the art "storage-to-decay" facility. Such a facility could consist of a reinforced concrete structure

with a leachate collection system, and capability to identify and repackage leaking containers. After five years' decay time these wastes are no longer radioactive and can be disposed of in landfills.

Longer-lived utility wastes should remain stored on-site until a safe and responsible method is developed to deal with their danger.

Utility wastes should never be placed in unlined trenches, as is current practice. All shallow-land burial sites have leaked and contaminated the surrounding area.

After the shallow-land burial failures, European designs for power plant wastes have evolved concrete cells 60 ft x 70 ft x 30 ft high, protected from the weather by a movable structure, complete with a remotely operated crane, and leachate collection system. The location of a leaking container can be identified, and the container can be repackaged.

It is essential that any radioactive waste facility for long lived power plant wastes be monitored (for detection and collection of leachate), retrievable (with the capability to repackage wastes) above-ground storage.

Technical terms

Roentgen – the quantity of x-ray or gamma radiation that will produce 1 esu

(electrostatic unit – a measurement of ionization) in 1 cm³ of air.

Rad – radiation absorbed dose. It is the quantity of radiation leading to the absorption of 100 ergs of energy per gram of irradiated material.

RBE – Relative Biological Effectiveness: a measure of comparing biological damage of ionizing radiation with that of x-rays of 200 kev energy.

Rem – roentgen equivalent man. Dose in rems = RBE × Dose in rads. Alpha radiation is much more damaging for the same rads than gamma radiation. 10 rads of alpha radiation equals 200 rems, whereas 10 rad of gamma radiation equals 10 rems. A milirem (mR) is a thousandth of a rem. Background radiation is in the order of 100–200 mR/yr.

Sievert – 100 rem. Sieverts are not as commonly used as rems, and perhaps have come into use to make the numbers appear less threatening.

Curie – a measure of radioactivity. It is defined as 37 billion disintegrations per second.

Bequerel – the basic unit of radioactivity in the meter-kilogram-second system. 1 Ci = 37 billion Bq

Gamma radiation – Part of the electromagnetic spectrum, with high energies and short wave lengths. This radiation readily penetrates matter. Shielding requires dense materials such as lead. Gamma radiation occurs in the decay of elements such as cobalt⁶⁰ and cesium¹³⁷

Beta radiation – electrons discharged in

the decay of some radioactive isotopes. Amount of shielding required depends on the energy level. Plastics usually provide good shielding.

Alpha radiation – the emission of the equivalent of the helium nucleus, consisting of 2 neutrons and 2 protons. Because of its weight an alpha particle will penetrate only a short distance – a few inches – in air, but are extremely biologically damaging if breathed in or ingested. Plutonium and all transuranics are alpha emitters.

BWR – a boiling water reactor. Steam is generated in the reactor vessel and piped to the turbine-generator to produce electricity. The turbine and all the auxiliary equipment become radioactive during operation, and extensive shielding is required. BWRs are the product of General Electric.

PWR – a pressurized water reactor. The hot water created in the reactor is pumped through steam generators where steam is produced. This steam, not radioactive, is used to generate electricity. More than 50% of nuclear plants in the US are of this design. The major problems have been with leaking tubes in the steam generators. This has resulted in outages and the very expensive replacement of steam generators. There is the potential for serious consequences from a steam generator tube rupture. PWRs are produced by Westinghouse, Combustion Engineering and Babcock & Wilcox.

Half life – The time when half the radioactivity has decayed. As a rule of thumb ten half lives to 20 half lives (a factor of 1000 to one million) are necessary to render the radioactivity harmless. Radioactive daughter products of the decay must also be considered since they can add considerably more time before a radioactive element becomes benign.

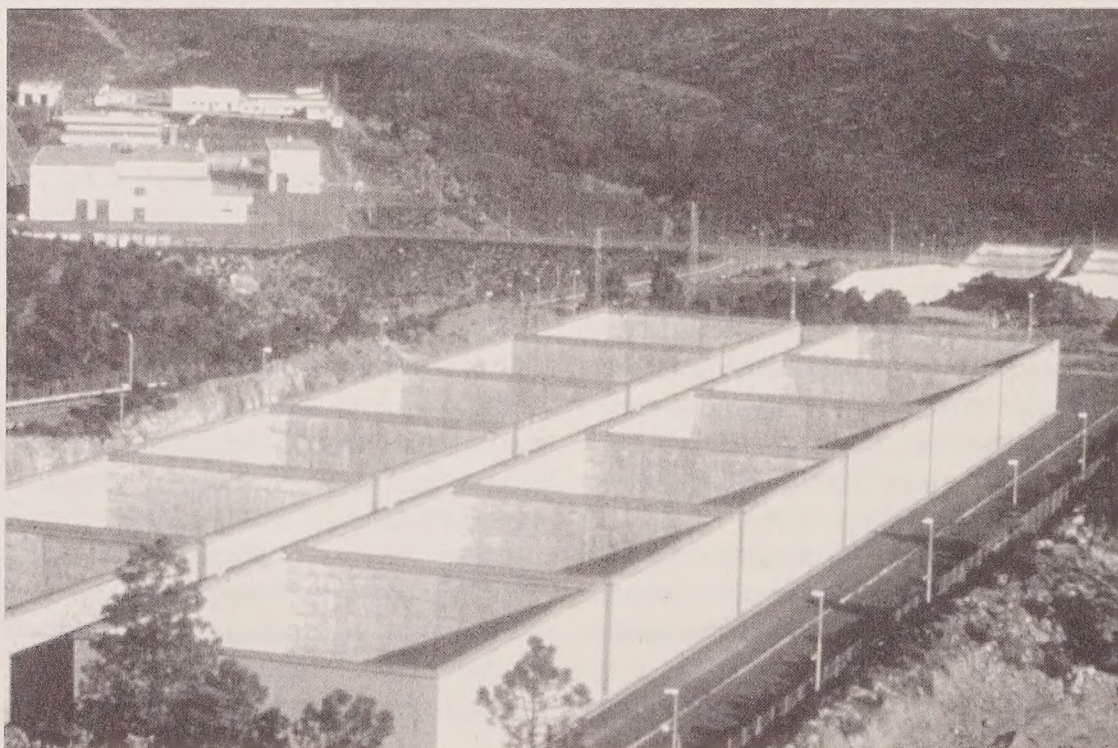
Nano – is a prefix for one billionth, 10⁻⁹

Pico – is a prefix for one trillionth, 10⁻¹²

5000 CPM – Five thousand counts per minute roughly corresponds to 1 mR/hr or 9 Rem/yr

Maximum occupational exposure – 5 Rem/yr

Ernest Goitein, a professional engineer, has spent his career in power plant design and construction, with fourteen of those years as project engineer for three nuclear power plants. He is a board member of the BAN Waste Coalition.



Statements by Native American Leaders

“The Ward Valley Dump Proposal is Environmental Racism”

Statement by Betty Cornelius, Director of the Colorado River Indian Tribes Cultural Museum:

We, as tribal people, we don't have anywhere to go. We have nowhere else to go on earth. We are here forever. That's just the way it is. We would speak out, maybe drastically, who knows. We would do things too, if we're pushed too far. And I believe that we must, we must speak out, because if we don't then it's going to come to us and then it will be too late to say anything. Our ways will be altered permanently. Our cultural ways, our cultural landscape, our visual resources. Everything will be changed.

Statement by Daniel Eddy, Jr., Chairman, Colorado River Indian Tribes:

Ward Valley has sacred, cultural and spiritual significance to the area's Indian tribes. The Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort Mojave, Chemehuevi, Quechan and Cocopah Tribes have documented the importance of Ward Valley and the Colorado River to their spiritual beliefs. These sacred areas — and the desert tortoise that inhabits Ward Valley — must not be destroyed by radioactive wastes. In addition, the dump would have a devastating and disproportionate impact on economic development and the livelihood of the area's Tribes. The proposed dump is a clear case of environmental racism and injustice.

Statement by Levi Esquerra, Chairman, Chemehuevi Indian Tribe:

According to the Department of the Interior's Federal Indian Trust

Responsibility, Interior, as trustee for the Tribes, has an affirmative duty to protect tribal health and safety.

Numerous reports have shown that a waste dump at Ward Valley, California may have a negative impact on the health and safety of the Indian Tribes along the Colorado River. Because of this, it is the Federal Government's responsibility to recognize and uphold the government to government relationship with Indian Tribes, and listen to the Tribes when we say, “No waste dump at Ward Valley!”

As a Federally recognized Tribe, the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe is dedicated to preserving these sacred ancestral homelands, and protecting the health and safety of its people. Further, the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe is strongly opposed to ANY waste facility at Ward Valley, California.

This waste dump must not be built, and we hope the Federal Government will realize their responsibilities towards Indian Nations, and a stronger relationship between the two entities will be created through working together.

Statement by Mike Jackson, Sr. President, Quechan Indian Tribe

My reaction to the proposal for a radioactive waste dump at Ward Valley is quite simple. Let us forget for a moment that we are dealing with nuclear waste. Let's talk about the so-called safe and sane medical waste. the cesium, the strontium and cobalt. These materials will be coming to Ward Valley in many different forms. These wastes constitute hazardous materials. This country has federal regulations that govern the disposal of hazardous

materials. Those same regulations would never allow hazardous materials to be buried in unlined cells, or in a watershed that contributes to one of this country's most prominent drainages, the Colorado River. By law hazardous waste can not be disposed of in a facility less stringent than what is used to dispose of household garbage.

Now let's exacerbate the problem. Let's make the nice safe medical waste radioactive. In addition, let's throw in waste from reactors and material from the military. Please, let's not forget all of the other glow in the dark materials like plutonium and uranium that do not constitute spent reactor fuel. Remember, low-level radioactive waste consists of all materials that are not spent fuel rods. Now the plan is to take this radioactive waste and bury it in those same unlined cells that would not even qualify for the disposal of typical household trash. Please remember that those cells would be located in a watershed that contributes to the Colorado River.

This is absolute madness. And so there can only be one response.

The Quechan Indian Tribe will fight the proposed Ward Valley Low Level Nuclear Waste Facility with all of its ability.

We are currently engaged in a fight on two fronts. One is in the white man's world of laws and regulations. The other in our world of religion and culture. We must carry this fight forward until we win. For we are at the bottom of the Colorado River. Our lands depend on its waters. We in turn rely on the land for our survival. This madness constitutes a very real threat to our existence. We must fight or perish. It is as simple as that.

US Ecology Lawsuits and Leaking Dumps

By Joe Lyou

We live in a litigious society. For many corporations, lawsuits have become a way of life. Sometimes they backfire. The proposed Ward Valley radioactive waste facility has been stopped in its tracks – not just because of effective opposition by activists and environmental organizations, but because the project contractor, US Ecology, has threatened to sue two scientists. Concerned that the Ward Valley dump would leak, the federal government asked two scientists to develop a way to perform safety tests at the site of the proposed dump. US Ecology responded with letters from their lawyer threatening to sue the scientists if they helped develop the testing procedures. The scientists asked the federal government to protect them against lawsuits. The federal government has yet to figure out how to do that. Presto! The Ward Valley project has been put on hold.

Meanwhile, US Ecology is caught in the embarrassing position of having complained about delays in the Ward Valley project while at the same time it has been disclosed that USEcology was the cause of those delays. The federal government may eventually figure out a way around the problem of protecting the scientists, but for now opponents of the Ward Valley radioactive waste dump can thank US Ecology for preventing any progress toward final project approval.

Many opponents of the Ward Valley dump believe that US Ecology's threats to the federal government's scientists indicate that the company fears the site will fail the proposed safety tests. Should those tests show that the dump will leak, the federal government could kill off the project. (Even should these tests at the currently undisturbed Ward Valley location prove negative, the company must still explain why its twin facility in Nevada failed – the subject of a separate environmental review.)

The call for the safety tests dates back to

1991, when US Ecology and the State of California first provided detailed technical information about their proposal to build a radioactive waste dump in Ward Valley, California. The site of the proposed dump, less than 20 miles from the Colorado River, had been studied by US Ecology as part of an environmental review and licensing processes. By reading through these studies, other government agencies found evidence suggesting that radioactive materials could move through the soil at Ward Valley much faster than US Ecology predicted.

US Ecology had found tritium (radioactive hydrogen) in soil moisture at depths of up to 100 feet below ground at Ward Valley (as far down as was measured). The tritium had come from either the nuclear weapons testing fallout or naturally occurring processes in the upper atmosphere, brought down to the surface by rain. Knowledge of the characteristics of tritium and the history of nuclear weapons testing indicate that tritium had moved down through the soil to at least 100 feet deep in less than 35 years. US Ecology had predicted it would take thousands of years to move this far. US Ecology had proposed to dump an enormous amount of tritium into unlined trenches at Ward Valley. In addition, tritium is often found as the "leading edge" of radioactive contamination problems – once there's tritium contamination, other contaminants may soon follow.

In 1994, the federal government asked the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to investigate several questions about the safety of the proposed Ward Valley dump. The tritium finding was among the specific issues addressed by the NAS panel. A majority of the members of the panel concluded that the tritium findings likely represented false readings – that no tritium actually exists in the ground below Ward Valley and that US Ecology's measurements were wrong. The panel unanimously recommended that further safety tests should

be done to resolve this issue. To the disappointment of opponents of the Ward Valley dump, they said that US Ecology could go ahead and build the dump before the safety tests were completed. (Two of the four hydrogeologists on the panel dissented from the majority view on this issue.)

What the NAS panel did not know was that researchers with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) had found off-site migration of tritium contamination at a radioactive waste dump in Beatty, Nevada. Prior to this discovery, the Beatty dump had been touted by Ward Valley dump supporters as a "good analog" for Ward Valley because of the many similarities between the two sites.

Discovered in the midst of the NAS review, USGS kept the Beatty finding secret while the NAS panel deliberated and issued its report. On the basis of the NAS report, the federal government moved toward granting final approval of the project. At what appeared to be the last minute, an environmental group discovered that USGS had been withholding the Beatty evidence. The release of this information helped convince the federal government to re-examine its position on Ward Valley. The federal government then decided to conduct the safety tests recommended by the NAS panel before reaching a final decision on the merits of the proposed dump. The government also decided to prepare a supplemental environmental study to examine significant new information about the project, including the Beatty leakage. US Ecology has now threatened to sue the scientists chosen to perform those tests. In so doing, it has delayed both the tests and the Ward Valley project indefinitely.

Dr. Joseph Lyou is Executive Director of Committee to Bridge the Gap, a Los Angeles-based public interest organization.

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